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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study of the validity of daily newspaper criticism, this report was based on the examination of the work of two competing critics and one relatively neutral cultural journalist covering four plays performed during the Stratford, Ontario, Shakespearean Festival. After examining the theoretical and philosophical context in which criticism is produced, the report presents the critics' and journalist's reviews. The third section records interviews with the writers on such topics as the purpose of a critical piece and whether criticism can be right or wrong. Observations and hypotheses based on the writers' work and interviews include the following: (1) widespread confusion exists over the designs and intentions of newspaper theatre criticism, (2) critics are generally believed to devote more of their writing to evaluation than is the case, (3) a reader's perception of what the critic has written will be almost entirely overshadowed by the evaluative component, (4) critics underestimate the effect their writing has on individual professionals, and (5) critics' standards show little relationship to those of regular theatregoers. (MM)

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PART I

Quips and Sentences
and
These Paper Bullets of the Brain

A CONTEMPLATION OF CRITICS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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by
Andrew MacFarlane

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London, Ontario
May 1982

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QUIPS AND SENTENCES AND THESE PAPER BULLETS OF THE BRAIN

A Contemplation of Critics

by

Andrew MacFarlane

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PART ONE

Beginning an examination of Canadian anglophone theatre criticism through the eyes and work of the critics themselves.

Acknowledgement

Part One of PAPER BULLETS is the first report of a continuing qualitative research project being conducted under the auspices of the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Windsor and the School of Journalism at The University of Western Ontario. The author is involved in graduate work at the former and a member of the faculty of the latter. He would like to thank Professor Mary Gerace of Windsor and Dean Peter Desbarats of Western for their support, and Peggy Stuart of London, Ontario, for her faithful and intelligent rendering of this document's several drafts.

In qualitative work, the subject becomes a co-researcher, and the author hereby expresses his gratitude to Mr. Conlogue, Miss Mallet and Mr. Nelson for their patient co-operation.

Andrew MacFarlane, London, Ontario

May 23, 1983

"Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor?"

- Benedick, Act II, Scene 3, Much Ado About Nothing.

* * *

"The more Composition the better. To Men of Letters, and Leisure, it is not only a noble Amusement, but a sweet Refuge; it improves their Parts, and promotes their Peace: It opens a back-door out of the Bustle of this busy, and idle world, into a delicious Garden of Moral and Intellectual fruits and flowers; the Key of which is denied to the rest of mankind....How independent of the world is he, who can daily find new Acquaintance, that at once entertain and improve him, in the little World, the minute but fruitful Creation, of his own mind?....These advantages *Composition* affords us, whether we write ourselves, or in more humble amusement peruse the works of others."

- Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition (1759).

* * *

"Dramatic art and the red-haired copy boy are the two stock jokes of the American newspaper office."

- George Jean Nathan (1922).

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INTRODUCTION

During the third week in June, 1981, the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, arguably Canada's most important annual cultural event, opened its season with four productions -- two dramas by Shakespeare, a Molière comedy and a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

It is reasonable to suppose that Stratford inspires a sense of Occasion not only among theatrical professionals and patrons, but also on the part of critics who come for opening week from across Canada and from as far away as New York and London, England.

Stratford, if not the world's cynosure, is very definitely a fixture on the cultural Grand Prix circuit, and it occurred to the author, who attended two of the opening nights and saw one of the first-week productions later, that the critics must somehow be galvanized by the significance of the event just as are actors and audiences. (Would it compare, for instance, to a county court judge being told: "Take this wig and gown and go and sit on the bench in that red chamber over there for a week?) Perhaps not. But I think it could be assumed that a major Canadian critic writing about Stratford opening nights would be on her mettle, or at his most professional, becoming, in other words, a perfect exemplar of The Critic, and therefore, particularly worthy of study at this time by anyone interested in the phenomenon of drama criticism in Canadian newspapers. The inherent interest value of the critics performing their roles in their own Festival spotlight was enhanced, for the author, by his reading of two of the country's leading critics following the productions he attended.

Ray Conlogue is a critic for Canada's national newspaper, The Globe and Mail; Gina Mallet for The Toronto Star, Canada's largest-circultation daily. They occupy two of the three most important drama desks in Canadian English-language newspaper journalism; the other one is Jamie Portman's at Southam Press. Because Stratford is in the circulation area covered by the Globe and the Star, Conlogue and Mallet have a particular impact on those connected with Festival productions including, one assumes, the international corps of critic colleagues in residence for the openings.

All of this was not, however, the initial motivation for undertaking this study. That came, rather, from what developed as a point-counterpoint series of contrasting opinions issuing daily from the critics of the two Toronto newspapers -- which are, of course, vigorous rivals in cultural as well as all other matters. (In this essay, incidentally, the critics are referred to in alphabetical order.)

The opening-night play, on June 15, The Misanthrope, which the author found diverting, was adjudged "a beautifully drawn production" by Mr. Conlogue and "Little more than a reading" by Miss Mallet. On June 16, Coriolanus, on the other hand, seemed to Mr. Conlogue to be "a bone-whitened ruin," while Miss Mallet greeted it warmly as "a big, noisy, macho production...that set the Festival Theatre pulsating."

On June 17, the author was captivated by a production of The Taming of the Shrew which Mr. Conlogue judiciously commended as "an enjoyable evening" and Miss Mallet found to be "a sexless production." An opening-day matinee performance of H.M.S. Pinafore which the author had thought was gorgeous, enthralled neither critic: "barnacles on the keel" - Conlogue; "might be mistaken for Shirley Temple's Good Ship Lollipop" - Mallet.

The effect of these ripostes was enhanced by the copy desks of the papers' cultural sections whose headline writers, given the more trenchant expression required by the constraints of their craft, expressed sentiments similar to those of the critics whose thoughts they were embellishing, but sometimes, it seemed, with a notch or two more intensity. (Perhaps headline writers are like ancient house-bound relatives who beg to be told each detail of an outing, clapping their hands with pleasure and gasping with astonishment at each delightful or startling detail, their reactions to the story of the event being even more pronounced than those of the participant.) In any case, when Mr. Conlogue espied barnacles on Pinafore, his head writer put the vessel in distress ("Pinafore wallows") and Miss Mallet's sent it straight to the bottom ("Pinafore sunk by ponderous reverence"). A sexless Shrew, said Miss Mallet. "Dud," observed the head writer, with somewhat more finality, and in a particularly distinctive flourish, Mr. Conlogue's headline person, summing up the critic's complaints about textual excision, titled his piece: "Coriolanus dies under the knife."

James Nelson covers cultural matters for the Canadian Press, the national news agency, whose logo (CP), appears on stories in most of the country's daily newspapers. Much CP material is exchanged, by being filtered through the agency's rewrite system, among the papers, which own it co-operatively. The agency also has staff writers, one of whom is Mr. Nelson, and he covers the arts, as a regular news beat, operating out of Ottawa. The annual Stratford openings are part of his turf, and, because the larger newspapers tend to have their own critics on hand, Mr. Nelson's essays although available from coast to coast, tend to be published in such unassuming organs as the Kamloops Sentinel, the Grande-Prairie Herald-Tribune, the Halifax Herald, the Charlottetown Guardian and, strangely enough, the Stratford Beacon-Herald, whose offices are just down Ontario Street from the Festival.

With such a widespread constituency right across middle Canada, Mr. Nelson avoids extremes in his reviews, which tend to concentrate on informing as opposed to convincing.

It seemed that his version of the four productions might serve as a sort of discerning balance between, or alongside, those of the Toronto critics. Had both Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet been outrageously wide of their marks, I think that a reading of Mr. Nelson would have made this clear, but as it was, in describing three of the four productions, Mr. Nelson reported the audience's overall reaction rather than his own: "Brian Bedford won an ovation"; "Len Cariou won an opening night ovation"; "Len Cariou...received a standing ovation". The fourth, Pinafore, where Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet found their only shared response (antipathy), cheered the cockles of Mr. Nelson's temperate heart as "a joyously sunny and fun-filled production." (Good on him: author.)

All of these critical observations have a symmetry in relationship to each other which, if not fearful, is quite arresting. For instance, a matrix constructed by reading the critics from, as it were, left to right -- Conlogue through Nelson to Mallet -- with + meaning positive, - meaning negative and 0 for neutral, unfolds this way:

	Conlogue	Nelson	Mallet
Misanthrope	+	0	-
Coriolanus	-	0	+
Shrew	+	0	-
Pinafore	-	+	- *

(The first three plays are listed in the order of their openings June 15, June 16 and June 17; the rhythm appears to have been broken by Pinafore which, in fact, opened in a day-one matinee to the asymmetrical delectation of Mr. Nelson and disdain of Miss Mallet.)

The binary perfection of contrariety expressed by the Toronto two has unquestionable charm to it: a sort of apple-pie order of oppositeness, but there is a problem. It makes rather a muddle of the basic assumption many people have about critics: that they tell us as authoritatively whether a play is good enough to see or bad enough to avoid.

Clive Barnes, described by his newspaper in the blurb accompanying his critique as "Broadway's foremost drama critic," and certainly, in fact, one of them, didn't actually unravel this confusion by taking a liking to everything he saw at Stratford. He told the readers of the

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*+ = a positive appraisal
- = a negative appraisal
0 = critical neutrality

July 11 New York Post that "the first three productions on the main festival's stage were all more than creditable." Misanthrope was "elegantly traditional," Coriolanus "sensational," and Shrew "positive and boisterous."

All of which appears to make some mock of any standard dictionary definition of a critic as "one skilled in estimating the quality of literature or artistic work." If construction standards, for instance, were in the hands of people similarly "skilled in estimating the quality" of cement, bridges would be falling down all over. Granted plays are only figuratively speaking bridges, but we do expect critics to tell us whether to entrust the weight of our minds, souls and pocketbooks to them. So presumably the question is: Should we? What indeed should we expect from a critic? What is theatre criticism for? More precisely, since journalist-critics are the ones whose work we regularly see most, what are daily newspaper critics up to?

It seemed to the author that in order to test the validity

(1) of the widespread assumptions about critical authority

and

(2) of newspaper criticism itself,

it would be useful to question the critics themselves. One reason for this is that if a person knew what it was that critics understood their role to be, it might be possible to have more reasonable expectations about their performance of it.

This, then, is a qualitative study of the validity of daily newspaper criticism based on

(1) examination (already commenced) of the work of two competing critics and one relatively neutral cultural journalist who covered the Stratford openings of June, 1981 and

(2) intensive interviews with all three.

The critiques in question are appended as are the verbatim records of the interviews, which the author taped, two by telephone and one (Conlogue) in person. Although each of the interviews was based on the same questionnaire (copy appended), this technique was not adopted to give any kind of uniformity in the responses. Rather, the author wished the interviewees to have a chance to reflect specifically on the topic areas, instead of giving him an instantaneous ("spontaneous") reaction to his questions. This is an important point: an attempt was made (successful, the author feels) to elicit substance rather than smoke. For this reason, each of the interviewees was mailed a copy of the questions a week in advance of the call or visit. On the occasion of the actual interview, there was no attempt to hold the participants to these questions (or any others); all of the interviewees took the opportunity to supplement or skip topics. The interviews vary in length because that is the way the critics responded. The only editing of the interview reports was to rectify inaudible portions. The Mallet interview had to be done in two sections because, during the first, the tape jammed for four questions before the author noticed it, and he didn't discover the extent of the damage until it was played back for transcription. The critiques and interviews are presented in the context of a glance at the subject of critical writing which attempts to start from a fairly general perspective and move its focus toward media criticism and newspaper drama criticism. It is evocative rather than exhaustive. The author also draws some conclusions, although he feels that the main value of the present work lies in its bringing together of the critiques in question and their juxtaposition with the revealing observations made by the critics about their work.

As can be the case in qualitative research, the current study is merely viewed as exploratory, generating and examining questions about criticism. Whether or not these eventually become hypotheses for a more quantitative investigation is moot. The author sees the next step as an extension of the current one,involving one or two more critics whose coverage of the same Stratford productions is available and possibly incorporating a further dimension in the form of a critique/interview with someone representing the production side of Stratford. This could be followed by a mailed survey (somewhat altered) to newspaper critics across the country, at which point the hypotheses would have been refined and presented in a way that some kind of quantitative data would result.

In the meantime, the author believes that the present study stands on its own. Clifford J. Christians and James W. Carey allude with approval to Isaiah Berlin's thoughts on social research in their chapter, "The Logic and Aims of Qualitative Research" in Stemple, Guido, III and Bruce Westley, eds. Research Methods in Mass Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.; Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981, p. 346:

> ...Berlin points out a general task of qualitative studies -- to make us aware of the categories in which we think and to analyze and critique such models.

Later on the same page, they continue:

> Humans live by interpretations. They do not [illegible]ely react or respond but rather live by interpreting exper[illegible]e through the agency of culture. This is as true of the microscopic forms of human interaction (conversation and gatherings) as it is of the most macroscopic forms of human initiative (the attempt to build religious systems of ultimate meaning and significance). It is, then, to this attempt at recovering the fact of human agency -- the ways persons live by intentions, purposes, and values -- that qualitative studies are dedicated. Thus we do not ask "how do the media affect us" (could we figure that out if we wanted to?), but "what are the interpretations of meaning and value created in the media and what is their relation to the rest of life?"

And, further in the same passage (now on p. 347):

> ...The task of social science, the basic task of qualitative studies, is to study these interpretations, that is, to interpret these interpretations so that we may better understand the meanings that people use to guide their activities.

If the observer feels that this is a high-falutin platform indeed from which to view the present modest work, the author makes no apology for disagreeing, but offers, instead, an appropriately qualitatively aphoristic reference to its role in relationship to the branch of research of which he feels it a part, namely that, no matter how high a ladder reaches, its lower rungs retain their value.

CRITICISM

Before comparing the three critics' views on the nature of their calling and the part it plays in society, it could be useful to examine the theoretical/philosophical context in which their work is produced and consumed. Theories are, of course, rarely prescriptive[1] in journalism of any sort. Practitioners do not customarily adhere to a particular philosophy of sports reporting, political coverage or police beat. While journalists are able to describe the details of where they go and what they do to get the news, they generally have little to say regarding the quality of the material they write, beyond classifying it as a "good" story or some simple variant thereof. This is true to a degree of the news reporter's colleagues in the more refined, and presumably more articulate, reaches of the cultural sections of the newspapers.

While the critics interviewed in this study were prepared to discuss with conviction -- and frequent eloquence -- the role of criticism and their methods of practising it, there was no great interest expressed in categorizing themselves as adherents of this or that critical school, or devotees of a particular theory.

Nonetheless, theories do encompass and codify critical practice. Just as a newspaper critique can provide a framework within which to reflect on a dramatic production, so a theory of criticism can offer a similar useful device for heightening the reader's experience of criticism itself. This, I believe, is true despite the fact that newspaper critics in Canada do not customarily set up as formalists, or auteurists or Marxists or whatever ("genre criticism done here").

Newspaper criticism is individualist and eclectic. But it does involve, even if only fragmentarily, the formally identified critical approaches; understanding these theoretical roots adds a significant dimension of awareness and enjoyment to its reading.

Newspaper critics, whether or not they are heavily preoccupied with it, exist, professionally, in an environment whose elements, dynamics, currents and energies have been identified, analyzed and classified in a rich literature of metacriticism[2] -- an artistic genre in itself. Furthermore the question of how critical writers who reach the most people (arguably, in Canada, those working for daily newspapers) see themselves and their calling in relation to the artistic events within their professional ambit, is a matter of considerable social relevance. This is particularly true if one accepts the commonly acknowledged view of the crucial role of culture, one unexceptionable formulation of which is set out by Ostry[3] as follows:

> Culture, however we define it, is central to everything we do and think. It is what we do and the reason why we do it, what we wish and why we imagine it, what we perceive and how we express it, how we live and in what manner we approach death. It is our environment and the pattern of our adaptation to it. It is the world we have created and are still creating; it is the way we see that world and the motives that urge us to change it. It is the way we know ourselves and each other; it is our web of personal relationships, it is the images and abstractions that allow us to live together in communities and nations. It is the element in which we live.

The centrality of criticism in our society is perhaps not so widely acknowledged as that of the culture of which it is both component and complement. Northrop Frye points out that

> The conception of the critic as a parasite or artist *manqué* is still very popular, especially among artists. It is sometimes reinforced by a dubious analogy between the creative and the procreative functions, so that we hear about the "impotence" and "dryness" of the critic."[4]

Frye, incidentally, disposes of this notion briskly:

> ...the fate of art that tries to do without criticism is instructive...A public that tries to do without criticism, and asserts that it knows what it wants or likes, brutalizes the arts and loses its cultural memory. Art for art's sake is a retreat from criticism which ends in an impoverishment of civilized life itself. The only way to forestall the work of criticism is through censorship, which has the same relation to criticism that lynching has to justice.[5]

Frye, who is himself a genre: the ikon-critic, deals primarily, in this seminal work, with literary criticism, and also draws a somewhat invidious distinction between the "public critic" (e.g. Lamb, Hazlitt, Arnold) and the author of "genuine criticism" -- the scholar-critic. Even so, his "reason why criticism has to exist" is all-embracing -- and striking:

> Criticism can talk, and all the arts are dumb.* In painting, sculpture, or music it is easy enough to see that the art shows forth, but cannot *say* anything... the artist, as John Stuart Mill saw in a wonderful flash of critical insight, is not heard but overheard. The axiom of criticism must be, not that the poet does not know what he is talking about, but that he cannot talk about what he knows. To defend the right of criticism to exist at all, therefore, is to assume that criticism is a structure of thought and knowledge existing in its own right, with some measure of independence from the art it deals with.[6]

The public critic, according to Frye, performs the rather tradesmanlike task of showing "how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature," and thus indicating "how literature is to be absorbed into society,"[7] but Criticism, on the other hand (capital mine) has the crucial responsibility of

> ....reforging the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept...If critics go on with their own business, this will appear to be, with increasing obviousness, the social and practical result of their labors.[8]

The business of criticism can be approached in terms of determinants that shape an artistic experience and in turn indicate its function and an associated critical method. Monaco suggests[9] that the determinants are (1) socio-political, (2) psychological,

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*A similar statement is attributed by George Jean Nathan to Oscar Wilde: "When his book is once opened, the author's mouth is shut." -- The Critic and the Drama (infra.), p. 18.

(3) technical and (4) economic. These are respectively associated with functions that (1) are utilitarian, (2) are expressive, (3) deal with art for art's sake or (4) focus on product and career, and with systems of criticism that are, in order, (1) ethical/political, (2) psychoanalytical, (3) esthetic/formalistic and (4) having to do with infrastructure.

This taxonomy of approaches, applied by Monaco to film criticism, echoes, in many respects, a more orthodox classification system, this one dealing primarily with literary criticism:

1. The Moral approach, which considers literature for its "moral application to humanity";
2. The Psychological approach, which uses "the terms and insights of a new science, Psychology, as a means of interpreting literature";
3. The Sociological approach, which looks at a work of art "emphatically as a consequence of the social milieu, or as affecting it";
4. The Formalistic approach, which concentrates "on the structure, the *form* of literary pieces, examining with such scrupulosity as to seem scientific";
5. The Archetypal approach, which is interested in "some human or social pattern unrelated to a particular time, yet to be found in particular works of literature, as if the unconscious mind of the human race were partially the author."[10]

Yet another way (this time using the language of cinema) of describing different approaches to analyzing works of art, is outlined by film theorist Sergei Eisenstein (quoted by James Monaco):

> "Long shot" criticism deals with the film in context and its political and social implications;
> "Medium shot" criticism focuses on the human scale of the film, which is what most reviewers concern themselves with;
> "Closeup" criticism "breaks down the film into its parts" and "resolves the film into its elements."[11]

Monaco adds:

> The essential concept here is the classical opposition between form and function. Are we more interested in what a film is (form) or in how it acts upon us (function)?

The first business of criticism is, of course, observation, and the various typologies quoted are based on different vantage points, different diagnostic features to be noted: in some respects like listing the kinds of observations that would be recorded by a bird-watcher and a wild flower fancier covering the same terrain together.

A further such division of cultural terrain into different sets of diagnostic features is what Monaco identifies as the driving force of the Hollywood cinema between the '30s and the development of neorealism in the late '40s:

> It was this dialectic between genre and *auteurs*...the clash between an artist's sensibility and the classic mythic structure of the story types that were identified and popular.[12]

The *auteur* theory of film criticism was developed in France in the '50s; its point is that the director is the main "author" of a film, assisted by people of lesser importance, such as actors and technicians.[13]

> French critics developed this theory as a way to interpret the so-called "New Wave" of European film makers...such as Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Italy's Frederico Fellini and Sweden's Ingmar Bergman.[14]

Monaco identifies such Hollywood *auteurs* as Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Josef von Sternberg, John Ford and even Busby Berkeley (for his personal invention of a whole genre of movie musicals).

The other side of this man-or-mythos dichtomy consists of the classical genres: Westerns, Musicals, Comedies, Screwball Comedies, Gangster films, Horror films, and Historical Romances.

> ....they proved engrossing in two respects: on the one hand, by their nature genres were mythic. To experience a Horror film, a Gangster film, or a Screwball Comedy was cathartic. The elements were well known: there was a litany to each popular genre. Part of their pleasure lay in seeing how those basic elements would be treated this time around. On the other hand, individual examples of a genre were also often specific statements. For the more knowledgeable observer, there was an equal interest in the multiple clash of styles in the film - styles of the studio, the director, the star, the producer, occasionally even the writer or designer or cinematographer. Genres offered infinite combinations of a finite number of elements.[15]

Media critics can be classified according to elements of one or another theory of criticism. In fact,Chang has done so in his Typology Study of Movie Critics.[16]

But popular newspaper drama critics appear not to classify *themselves* although, as suggested earlier, fragments of many theories emerge in their thoughts about themselves and their professional roles.

The eclecticism of newspaper journalism is one reason for this which has already been advanced; another may be that drama, which includes both literature and performance, is likely to demonstrate the widest scope in the approach, methods and expression of its critics.

In 1948, Nathan Cohen, the best-known popular drama critic in Canada during the time he worked for the Toronto Star and appeared regularly on the CBC from the late '40s through the '60s, saw a definite sociological role for the Canadian critic:

> ...Here in Canada,the dramatic critic has additional duties. The first is to encourage the embryonic legitimate theatre which has to fight against public apathy and amateur resentment...[17]

Three decades later, Robert Rutherford Smith identified similar motivation among critics of television. He pointed out that, while attempting to provide insight and helpful evaluation of television programs,critics may have many objectives ranging from reform of the commercial broadcasting system to emphasizing what is "journalistically interesting at the expense of the critically important" in order to establish a readership.[18]

But, as might be expected in dealing with a medium that has such relentless impact on every individual in western industrial society, Smith identifies the most significant current approach in television criticism as sociological rather than esthetic:

> ....there have been important changes in the ways in which criticism of broadcasting is phrased. Perhaps the most important is the change from a concern with *quality* which was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s, to a concern with *effects*.[19]

This is a frank ascription of sociological function to popular criticism, and it's interesting to note that the ultimate expression would be found in Marxist criticism, in which a critic, like an author, is valid only to the degree that his work supports the objectives of the state. (One suspects this kind of criticism would be anathema to Smith, but it is one of the fundamental ironies of the idea of "social responsibility" imposed on cultural manifestation for virtuous reasons, by a democratic state, that it leads inevitably to a totalitarian (e.g. Marxist) theory of expression, whether the mode be journalism, theatre or critical writing. This echoes the earlier-quoted reference by Frye to a culture that attempts to do without critics.)

The approaches abstracted by critic-journalists and combined in varying aggregates vary all the way from this sort of preoccupation with the social results of works of art to the total concentration on the art itself expressed in the "new" criticism. This genre of course is not new at all, but an established orthodoxy, which is also described as formalism and structuralism, and includes the painstaking technique of textual analysis:

> In life things happen aimlessly, carelessly, even stupidly. Not so in art, where the unseen hand of the artist, an idea

Henry James was fond of, directs the organization and course of the work. To discover the organization of a literary work, that is, the relatedness of all the parts included in the whole as they are, is the proper subject of structural criticism.[20]

Just as they may appear to bend pieces of many theories into their own critical fabric, newspaper critics may with equal insouciance reject orthodox critical approaches, for instance, the casual dogmatism implicit in the foregoing description of structuralism.

It is in sharp contrast to the view expressed by George Jean Nathan in a book written when he was the dean of American daily newspaper drama critics:

> I have always perversely thought it likely that there is often a greater degree of accident in fine art than one is permitted to believe...Art is often unconscious of itself (cf Frye, *supra.*) Shakespeare, writing popular plays to order, wrote the greater plays that dramatic art has known. Mark Twain, in a disgusted moment, threw off a practical joke and it turned out to be literature.[21]

Even on such a fundamental issue as the critic's responsibility for establishing the intention of an author or playwright, there is substantial disagreement.

Levitt's structural approach is based on the clear-cut assumption that

> We cannot say what the author wanted to do. The finished work is given and understood. We know what is there so why repeat it? What we do not know, and what the question of

> function can get at, is whether what is there should be there and if so why, and if not, why not...[22]

Because he found that "intent and achievement are not necessarily twins," George Jean Nathan was not a total devotee of the "author's-intention" school, but he went part of the way.

> To the Goethe-Carlyle doctrine that the critic's duty lies alone in discerning the artist's aim, his point of view and, finally, his execution of the task before him, it is easy enough to subscribe, but certainly this is not a "theory" of criticism so much as it is a foundation for a theory. To advance it as a theory, full-grown, full-fledged and flapping...is to publish the preface to a book without the book itself.[23]

Nathan Cohen, on the other hand, had no doubts about this part of a drama critic's task. He told his radio audience:

> Now,a drama critic must do more than just examine play structure and performance...he must also search for subject values and explain to the audience what the author of a play wants to say and how well he has made his point.

* * *

The business of criticism appears to be defined anew by each of its practitioners: if one could generalize at all accurately it would probably only be to say that critics are individualists with a desire/need to place their opinions before others. Even the degree of this motivation to tell others what they think varies, as will be seen in the degrees of vehemence expressed in what follows by the three critics studied intensively for this essay, ranging from a certain tentativeness on the part of James Nelson through the articulate conviction of Ray Conlogue to the flamboyant expressiveness of Gina Mallet.

George Jean Nathan is perfectly unrepentant about his ego. "Criticism is personal or it is nothing," he says. "Talk to me of impersonal criticism and I'll talk to you of impersonal sitz-bathing,"[24] and adds, in a somewhat more serious vein:

> All criticism is, at bottom, an effort on the part of its practitioner to show off himself and his art at the expense of the artist and the art which he criticizes...The great critics are those who, recognizing the intrinsic, permanent and indeclinable egotism of the critical art, make no senseless effort to conceal it.[25]

Walter Kerr, a later decanal figure in American newspaper criticism, made a similarly unabashed (and doubtless facetious) admission to the truth about the critic-journalist's ego:

> I have no standards of criticism whatever...I am simply having a personal ball for myself when I write my review. (My) reaction to the play has been subjective, capricious, uninformed and closely related to the state of my digestive system on that particular evening...[26]

Isabel St. John Bliss points out that Edward Young, the author, some two centuries before, of the classic work, Conjectures on

Original Composition, recognized, with total lack of amusement, the same tendency. He felt, she says, that:

> The greater number of critics...lacking basic principles of evaluation, judge from personal reasons: one judges "as the weather dictates; right/ The poem is at noon, and wrong at night"; another judges by the author's family connections; "Some judge their knack of judging wrong to keep;/Some judge, because it is too soon to sleep." But the basic weakness of most critics is that they seek their own fame: "To gain themselves, not give the writer, fame."[27]

The predominant role of unfettered individuality, personality, subjectivity...the personal nature of media criticism, is emphasized repeatedly by practitioners and writers on popular critical methods.

George Jean Nathan even appropriated a figurative place onstage for the critic-personality:

> Even the best dramatic criticism is always just a little dramatic. It indulges, a trifle, in acting.[28]

And Nathan Cohen, who was said to regard himself as the only serious newspaper critic in Canada, surely was not the first or last to take the next step, in which the critic, as well as his criticism "indulges a trifle in acting."

> ...Cohen was becoming a public figure and, to a certain extent, he began to cater to his image as the irascible enemy of sham in the theatre and society. He augmented the impact of his massive frame by invariably carrying a walking stick.

(When once asked by an acquaintance if he "really needed his canes," Cohen replied, "No, they're pure affectation.")- and his appearance at a theatre could cause quite a little stir of interest in itself. For although Cohen delivered his work over a microphone or in print, his real working environment was the back or middle rows of a darkened theatre. Relaxed, but attentive, he would keep his eyes on the stage as though he was on the verge of discovering something great that was sooner or later bound to happen there, and he rarely betrayed irritation at what was happening before him. If he became too disgusted, he quitely left the theatre. During intermission he would stand alone, looking massive and detached, puffing imperiously on a cigarette and avoiding any attempt to chitchat about the performance. On occasion, the hooded glow of a pen light would flicker in the darkness, as he began jotting down notes, and at that point, whether they had seen him before or not, theatregoers who caught the flicker of that muted bobbing light, would nudge each other and whisper "Nathan Cohen..."[29]

Well, the result of emphatic egocentricity in terms of what the critics write can often be categorized under two more rubrics, one of them not generally used to describe media criticism and the other normally indicating a degree of scholarly disapproval.

The first is imagism, by which I mean a quality related to Ezra Pound's definition:

> An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...It is the presentation

of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. It is better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.[30]

For instance, in his book, The Decline of Pleasure, quoted by Roderick Bladel, Walter Kerr writes:

> We accept a halo in a painting because we are agreed, abstractly, on what it stands for. That is one kind of knowing...But to recognize something -- without having agreed upon it, without even having discussed it -- is knowing, too. The mind is stabbed on a spot it did not know was vulnerable. This is knowing by contact, on contact.[31]

Bladel continues:

> Knowing "by contact, on contact" is the province of intuitive knowledge, a kind of "knowing" which Kerr finds easy to experience and difficult to define...Intuitive knowledge is deeply personal in that it is dependent upon sensation; yet it is also 'common' knowledge. Every man possesses a storehouse of knowledge acquired intuitively. Therefore, one man can recognize in another an intuitive experience he himself once had, even though the experience defies measurement and proof.[32]

The intellectual and emotional imagism, the sudden inner illumination inspired by the work of art, the critic's reliance on his own sense of exaltation/recognition as an important part of what he will share with his audience, suggests poetic insight, as described by

James Ingram Merrill, the distinguished poet, in discussing the relationship between art and criticism.[33] All work, he acknowledged, is not of equal value, but in poetry we find "bursts of self-disclosure" and not so much a recital of verifiable concepts as "our private song singing in the wilderness." In this lyrical "dialogue with the universe" the poet reveals "larger truths glimpsed through the things of this world," a somewhat ethereal, but I think apt, similitude to the imagist-critic's intuitive comprehension of a production's patterns of truth.

Neville Cardus speaks from a more terrestrial footing, although he was an individualist of parts, covering, as he did, culture and cricket for The Manchester Guardian, one of Britain's quality newspapers. He describes, in workmanlike terms, the process of coming into contact with a work of dramatic art:

> The main thing was to get imaginatively into the heart of a work and performance and then to describe, in as good and suggestive English as one could command, an experience of mind and soul while under the creator's spell. This is merely one way -- it has been called the way of the "sensitized palate." But it is an error to think that such a way denotes indifference to hard study, logical analysis, and some acquaintance with the best that has been achieved in all schools. The "sensitized palate" critic prepares himself, cultivates himself until he develops antennae or "cat's whiskers" which he trusts to work instinctively when he surrenders temporarily to the creative artists. It is a case with him of love and faith as much as

> of deliberately directed reason. He is, in a word, merely one of the audience, -- but more enlightened, more expert at reception (because this is his livelihood) than the rest. The trouble with the dominant school of criticism today (*this was written in 1953: author*) is that the tendency is toward analysis before the imagination has been allowed the chance to make a synthesis.[34]

Imagism was the first of two categories of newspaper criticism referred to earlier; the second is impressionism, a term that fairly describes the process outlined by Neville Cardus (and many other journalist-critics) to describe their methods.

It seems not to be a highly esteemed critical technique. Wilbur Scott, whose Five Approaches of Literary Criticism were earlier cited, identifies a sixth and seventh approach in his book, only to point out that he is not going to discuss them. One is a concern with fitting a work into literary tradition, which he says belongs in literary history rather than criticism (*vide genre criticism: author*).

> A second approach also unrepresented is the impressionistic. Everyone has impressions in the face of literary experience, and many are compelled to record them. Their value depends, of course, upon the taste, knowledge, and writing ability of the critic.

Walter Kerr agreed with the emphasis placed on taste by Scott (although he described it with journalistic enthusiasm rather than scholarly disdain):

> Taste is for the most part a matter of exposure: the man who has seen the most is likely to know the most. Some intelligence must always be presumed; some theoretical study may also

> be presumed; but it is usually far in the past and now only a matter of absorbed background. (Interview, Equity magazine, 1958.)[35]

Bladell's analysis of Kerr's criticism explicitly confirms his approach:

> As a theatre critic, Walter Kerr is an impressionist and a relativist. His reviews are impressionistic in that they attempt to describe an experience inspired in him by a given play. He is a relativist in that he tries to avoid rigid preconceptions as to what the experience should be... The only criterion which approaches an absolute is that the play must *involve* him either cerebrally or emotionally...He does not depend primarily upon theories in his practical criticism. He first reacts subjectively, just as any other impressionistic critic. Then he makes a judgment in the review, describing specific concrete elements in the play and production which have brought about his reaction. His readers may accept his reaction or reject it. He customarily devotes more space to description than to explanation, especially when the review is favorable. When he goes beyond description to explain *why* he has reacted as he has, the explanation tends to be drawn either from tradition or from a belief in the mystical power of intuition. He is not bound by tradition. In his reviews he is bound by his own taste and thought.[36]

There is a resonance, reaching across time and geography, among these pronounced themes expressed by and about critics, including, as would be expected, the need for criticism, stated on behalf of Mr. Frye's "public" critics with particular eloquence by George Jean Nathan:

> All art is a kind of subconscious madness expressed in terms of sanity; criticism is essential to the interpretation of its mysteries, for about everything truly beautiful there is ever something mysterious and disconcerting...Art is a partnership between the artist and the artist-critic. The former creates; the latter re-creates. Without criticism, art would of course still be art, and so with its windows walled-in and its lights extinguished would the Louvre still be the Louvre. Criticism is the windows and chandeliers of art: it illuminates the enveloping darkness in which art might otherwise rest only vaguely discernible and perhaps altogether unseen.[37]

The next section of this essay provides an opportunity to examine how the writers upon whom it concentrates discharged their responsibilities in the artist-critic "partnership."

THE CRITIQUES

HEADNOTE

The essential obbligato to the theme of a critic's professional philosophy is of course its expression for public consumption -- a particular artistic genre of its own. George Jean Nathan referred earlier to "the artistic-critic." Nathan Cohen, reflecting on the same topic:

> Criticism itself is an art form...a contributory one I'll grant you...but an art form nonetheless.[38]

Walter Kerr's critical biographer characterizes him as an artist:

> ....there is evidence his approach to criticism itself is creative. Richard Watts, critic for the New York Post, finds Kerr his only colleague able to "capture the quality of a performer in action and bring it to life vividly for the performer."[39]

This view of Kerr is echoed in a scholarly study of New York critics:

> His articles revealed insight, an educated intelligence, sound knowledge of the art he was criticizing, and a polished literary style...His reviews were not simply verdicts; they recreated the event[40] (note the similarity to thoughts expressed decades earlier by George Jean Nathan *supra*: author).

In less exalted terms, Robert Rutherford Smith describes critical creativity as follows:

> Critics are concerned with evaluation...(but) evaluation by itself is not a very helpful act. If critics behaved like baseball umpires who merely call the pitches without explaining how they arrive at their evaluations, they would be of little use to their readers. Critics must explain their evaluations. If this is done successfully, the result will be a new insight which may aid their readers in making future decisions. This insight is perhaps the greatest contribution critics can make to their readers.[41]

The 12 critiques that follow demonstrate, in addition to the evaluative differences noted above, the dimensions of information, artistry and insight offered readers of these 1981 Stratford Festival opening reviews.*

*NOTE: Apparently discrepant dates are owing to the appearances of reviews a day late in the Southwestern Ontario edition of the Globe and Mail.

THE MISANTHROPE

The Globe and Mail
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

Excellent Misanthrope is high-quality comedy

By Ray Conlogue

STRATFORD -- I'm sure everybody breathed a sigh of relief at Monday night's beautifully drawn production of The Misanthrope.

After a self-conscious start with H.M.S. Pinafore in the afternoon, Stratford hit its accustomed pace with Moliere's great comedy about the misanthrope who would flee the hypocrisy of the world -- if only he weren't in love with the most dishonest woman in Paris.

When the lights come up on Desmond Heeley's set, a green distillation of a Louis XIV formal garden, Brian Bedford as Alceste is telling off his friend Philinte (Nicholas Pennell) for his slavish adherence to one of the rules of that formal society: always flatter. With grace and force Alceste builds his argument that you must be cruelly honest with shoddy people in order to sincerely care about the good ones. Pennell's Philinte, wearing rueful compassion in his eyes, counterargues forcefully, but his real strength is the strength of his goodness: he is like a still and benign pool.

There was a rich and attentive quality to the audience's laughter as the two men -- leaving us aware of the grace of Moliere's language without once slipping into the sing-song trap that awaits rhyming couplets on the English-speaking stage -- gradually built the tension of the argument until, at the first sign of genuine anger in Alceste, Philinte delicately tips the conversation toward Alceste's one weakness: the beautiful Celimene, who amuses herself by leading on any number of suitors at the same time.

In the subsequent scenes, where by a painful and humiliating progression of events Alceste is made to see how Celimene has made a fool of him, there are many occasions for high comedy (by which I mean a rueful laughter of recognition) as well as a bit of farce with the fops Acaste and Clitandre -- also, of course, in love with Celimene.

Nobody else in the cast comes near the purity of the approach to Moliere in that first scene between Alceste and Philinte, but there are several performers in different styles who contribute outstandingly. Scott Hylands is the terrible poet Oronte, who forces Alceste to pass judgment on his sonnet and then persecutes him for his honesty: he has a robust virility in his self-presentation, like a street fighter turned poet who will certainly flatten the nose of any detractor.

Susan Wright, as Eliante, is peculiarly moving in the little shudder she gives when Alceste betrays his anger at Celimene. Without saying another word, she conveys that she is in love with him, but is smart enough to see he is intrigued only by impossible challenges. A gifted comedienne, Miss Wright also moved very far Monday night toward establishing herself as an actress of wider talent.

Pat Galloway returns to Stratford to play Arsinoe, the shrew who masks her unattractiveness to men in a show of disdain for them. Like Bedford and Pennell, she brought a depth of confidence to the role that established its authority without for a moment embalming it. This aging reputation-wrecker, by the way she touches her parasol to her nose or picks up a book on a table, betrays an inner turmoil of envy and hatefulness that makes her elegant pieties devastatingly funny.

Sharry Flett was a disappointing Celimene. In her first engagement with the vast interior of the Festival Theatre, it was all she could do to project her voice and the first layer of Celimene's personality: a heartless bitch. When Acaste and Clitandre lead her on in vicious gossip about other men at court, she fails to leaven her malice with the charm that would explain why men are attracted to her. After all, not even a lovesick male is going to step into a bear trap unless it is disguised with a little greenery.

It's perhaps unfair to compare her reading of the lines with masters such as Bedford or Pennell; but an audience listening to those two is going to be looking for the same wealth of nuance and humor from everybody on stage. Miss Flett lost half the payload in her lines. There was some compensation in her arch and striking physicality, and the values she did go after -- "incorrigible triviality" in translator Richard Wilbur's words -- were strongly enough established to make the spectator's blood boil. But there was no hint of remorse when she was finally exposed, or of possible future humanity -- a cutting off of dimensions to her character that Moliere was a clever enough writer to insert for her.

Jean Gascon's direction seems effortless; quite an achievement on the Festival stage. For a director who has not always worked well at Stratford, it is gratifying to see him succeed in moving the values of French classicism so amusingly and gracefully onto an English stage.

Toronto Star
Tuesday, June 16, 1981

Moliere deserves better

And Bedford has the wit to make a finer job of it

By Gina Mallet

STRATFORD -- Times are hard, morale is low, and money, so they say, is scarce as hen's teeth.

The Stratford Festival has had a well-advertised rough year. Still, it barely seems possible, in fact, it is hardly in the realm of credibility that the new Stratford administration would actually allow the opening production on the Festival Theatre stage to be little more than a reading.

Yet that is all The Misanthrope is, and an uninspired reading at that. What's more, the description errs only on the side of kindness.

There is something wholly debilitating and eventually infuriating in watching actors such as Brian Bedford, Pat Galloway, Nicholas Pennell and Susan Wright promenade around the Festival stage like a roomfull of manikins, adopting elaborately artificial poses as they throw off the rhyming couplets of Richard Wilbur's excellent translation of Moliere's comedy manque, without appearing to have connected any of the words to their own feelings.

Born to play role

It must be added that they are placed at a disadvantage by the stage itself. Appallingly decorated with artificial turf the shade of preppy green, and garnished with plastic trees, the Festival stage has never looked uglier. Moreover, operating room lighting renders the entire cast as blanched if sprightly octogenarians -- an appearance which should have had the actors' agents on the telephone first thing today.

But how, you will ask, can such a cast fail to bring The Misanthrope to life? Bedford in particular seems to have been born to play the priggish Alceste, the last honest man, or something like that, in the worldly and mendacious France of Louis XIV? And perhaps one day Bedford will fulfil the role. As it is now, Bedford, who is giving a performance that seems unbelievably lackluster when ranged alongside his Benedick and Malvolio of last year, is working without a context. The fact is that Jean Gascon, himself a former artistic director of the festival, has obviously provided no concept for the production. He has just put the play on stage and left it there.

What a mistake. The Misanthrope may be generally considered Moliere's finest achievement, yet for the majority of theatregoers, the claim has to be proved. It isn't as accessible as School For Wives or half as funny as Tartuffe. The Misanthrope is remote, intellectual, highly stylized, and it demands a level and intensity of performance to provoke continuous argument. And more than Moliere's other plays, it also requires a framework to make it accessible to audiences today.

First of all, who are these people? Why are they made to appear out of nowhere? What rank do they belong to? Alceste is railing against his society? Why can't we know more about the society through the nuances of behavior and the development of character?

And what is Alceste railing at? From this production, it often seemed he was just grumbling because his friends and acquaintances led sensual lives. We can see that the drug of candor drives away friends and allies alike, that it causes law suits and makes him unable to be lived with. But we need to see how it comes into conflict with his sudden passion for his opposite, Celimene, a young woman as transparent and false as he is serious and true. He would reform her. When she refuses to be reformed, he immediately ceases to love her.

If Alceste did not tell the truth with the kind of blunt wit that takes the malice out of his frankness, he would be dismissed as a bad joke. As it is, he can be made (and surely Bedford on a better day could make him into a grouch on the order of Jack Benny) a party-pooper with a single line.

Flirts with tragedy

And he can be made more of. The Misanthrope flirts with tragedy. Alceste is looking into the heart of the human situation. By his refusal to play political games or to build his life on subtle evasion and skillful fibs, he avoids the cheap triumphs of charm. There can be both irony and pathos in his loss of

Celimene and her loss of him. As it is now, there is only a faint air of puzzlement.

At the level of this production, it seems much more likely that they will kiss and make up and go off and get married -- whereas, of course, what should be revealed is the profound incompatibility of the lovers that indicates not merely two hostile parties in this battle of the sexes, but a deeper kind of incompatibility that rents all human relationships.

But to reach such depths, the play must first fully engage the audience.

In the early '70s, the British National Theatre produced a contemporary version of The Misanthrope which was set in the imperial presidency of Charles de Gaulle, and the updating did the play a world of good. There were all these chic Parisian intellectuals mauling and scratching and worrying over fine points of philosophy, a context that made the play immediately accessible as well as immediately engaging. Getting in tune with Louis XIV requires a different kind of headset.

It is expected that the director of a play like The Misanthrope will try hard to find the right headset to tune his audience in. Gascon should also have struggled to find the right Celimene. Sharry Flett is a truly delightful actress, but she is far too soft and gentle and yielding to ever play Celimene, a lady who is adept at sado-masochism and loves cutting people off at the knees in a way that has them begging for more.

Susan Wright and Pat Galloway, in the roles of Eliante and Arsinoe, have little more to do than make brief enlivening appearances, albeit without much sense of what they are doing, while Nicholas Pennell is suave but purposeless as Philinte.

The Misanthrope:

By Moliere. English verse translation by Richard Wilbur.
Directed by Jean Gascon. Designed by Desmond Heeley. Music
by Alan Laing. Lighting by David F. Segal. Festival Theatre.

The Beacon Herald
Tuesday, June 16, 1981

Bedford praised for role in Festival Theatre opening

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

Brian Bedford -- a British-borm American actor whose characteristically austere mannerisms on stage fitted him ideally for the part -- won an ovation in the title role in Moliere's The Misanthrope at the formal opening of the Stratford Festival Monday night.

Irascible, scornful of society's insincerities and the world's follies, Moliere's hero Alceste turns his back on mankind and goes off to seek peace of mind in some kind of 17th Century hermitage.

But could anyone really cast himself out from the luxurious grace of Louis XIV's court circle, vividly brought to the stage by designer Desmond Heeley, and the feminine charms of his first and second loves as played by Sharry Flett and Susan Wright?

It is only the second time in Stratford Festival history that a non-Shakespeare play has opened the season in the 2,000-seat Festival Theatre. The other occasion was in 1974 when William Hutt starred in the Imaginary Invalid.

Both productions were directed by Jean Gascon, and of course both are by Moliere, the near contemporary of Shakespeare who is France's great contribution to classical theatre.

Entering his fifth season in the festival, Bedford plays the disdainful hero well. His solemn face, masterful use of the long pause between thoughts, and determined stance set him apart from all other actors.

Nicholas Pennell, a Stratford veteran, plays Alceste's friend, Philinte, with understanding and slight amusement. Scott Hylands, in his first Stratford season, is Alceste's rival for the love of Celimene.

As Celimene, Sharry Flett, also in her first Stratford role, is a bewitching creature whom Moliere has given high social station and wealth, and a mischievously roving heart. Alceste suffers the heartbreak as long as he can before he throws her over.

Susan Wright, star of last season's A Flea in her Ear at the Shaw Festival, is Eliante, Celimene's cousin and the second-best object of Alceste's love. In the end she rejects him and turns to Philinte.

Pat Galloway, long a Stratford star, has the catty role of Arsinoe, the "friend" who love to gossip. The scene between Flett and Galloway, as each relates the latest scandal about the other, is a gem that would alone make the whole evening worthwhile.

CORIOLANUS

The Globe and Mail
Thursday, June 18, 1981

Coriolanus dies under the knife

By Ray Conlogue

STRATFORD -- The most surprising thing about Brian Bedford, who acts Shakespeare with rueful comedy, is the dark and louring view of the same playwright he reveals when he puts on his director's hat.

In Titus Andronicus there was a bloody and golden splendor about this vision; in Coriolanus, which opened Tuesday night, the same values were stillborn. What should have held ceremonial majesty betrayed ceremonial tedium; what could have been complex settled for being bombastic.

It's easy to point a finger at this late play -- "seldom acted," as Bradley once mentioned, adding that "perhaps no reader ever called it his favorite." But Titus is equally neglected. In both cases Bedford tries to bring eclipsed Shakespeare back into the light by heavy cutting of the text, by rich and stirring lighting effects and visual tableaux, and by requesting a certain style of acting from the cast.

In Coriolanus he has straightaway dumped all the comic relief. No illbred Roman commoners bat solecisms like "directitude" back and forth. If this has not made things severe enough, Bedford also ends several scenes at their climactic moments, leaving out the falling action that softens the characters or fleshes out their motives. So we have Coriolanus , who has abandoned Rome and now leads an army of his former enemies against its gates, yielding finally to the pleading of his mother, Volumnia. But the aside of Aufidius, the enemy general with whom Coriolanus is now in uneasy alliance, is deleted. Again, when Aufidius has betrayed Coriolanus to his murderers, his too-late moment of penitence ("My rage is gone, and I am struck with sorrow") is delivered in a spiteful and mean-spirited fashion.

These observations are not nit-picking. The cuts, the delivery are essential to the spare, relentless, singleminded exposition of warrior valor which Bedford has in mind. But Coriolanus, bereft of subplot and poetry even as Shakespeare left it, does not need further sandblasting. The play, which in a sympathetic interpretation would be a spare essay in Roman architecture, becomes in Bedford's hands a bone-whitened ruin.

Ruins have their charms, and Bedford as director has his talents. Together with Michael Whitfield's extraordinary lighting, he has created visual tableaux that must be among the most striking ever seen on the stage. The opening, with a crescent of dimly lit, prone and tangled, malevolently sighing peasants ranged up and down the staircases; Coriolanus' dash into the hideously backlit gates of the city of Corioles; the semicircle of Volscian officers ranged along the front row of seats while Aufidius denounces Coriolanus -- all these demonstrate a controlling and strong esthetic. And he has encouraged Arne Zaslove to stage the battles in striking, ritualistic fashion which in the riveting, almost erotic single combat between

Coriolanus and Aufidius generated a round of applause by itself.

But why does Bedford, who speaks Shakespeare with unusual intelligence, allow (or, is it possible, even encourage) the bellowing assault on the lines that we hear from Len Cariou's Coriolanus right down to the mouthiest Volscian sentry?

In Cariou's case there is a problem with the actor himself. Sweeney Todd was a useful target for Cariou's ample virility, but that virility in Shakespearean roles (including the Macbeth we saw in Toronto last fall) does not work very well. It's not that Cariou isn't doing the lines well; he is confident and intelligent. But there is a clipped, snarling tone combined with a jaw-chomping motion reminiscent of a nutcracker that declares out loud: "Here I am, working at being a tough guy." The harder he works at it, the more Cariou points up the absence of a lean, hawk-like quality to his virility -- a quality that Scott Hylands as Aufidius possesses in abundance.

Hylands, who demonstrated quality in The Misanthrope earlier this week, shows with his Aufidius that he is one of the lucky catches of the new Stratford company. He is muscled like a whippet, menacing as a gila monster and perhaps the only actor who could make the "shredded savagery" cliche of Desmond Heeley's Volscian costumes look actually savage. It remains to be seen whether these qualities can be magnified for leading roles.

Lewis Gordon, an actor of whom I am more fond than some, seems to have been chosen to give the role of Coriolanus' friend

Menenius a fatherly warmth. This he does, in excess. It was a relief against the predominant macho pounding, but only once did I feel he threw himself heart and soul into his role -- and that was for a few brief but very touching moments defending himself against a sentry's taunts after Coriolanus has rejected him. It's too bad that genuineness wasn't a feature throughout the evening.

Barbara Chilcott, a commanding, carnivorous presence as Coriolanus' mother, was nonetheless a disappointment. Perpetual quivering of the vocal cords is no substitute for properly feeling one's way through a part. Her pleading with her son, which could have been most moving, was hard to listen to.

Lynn Griffin in the thankless role of Coriolanus' wife had little to do but play mater dolorosa (more accurately, uxor dolorosa) and played it very well. She invested her few and baldly written lines with great feeling. Max Helpmann and Barney O'Sullivan as the tribunes who unseat Coriolanus did to death the demagoguery of their roles. It may be that Shakespeare "loathed the common Englishman," but it's not necessary in performing him to pander to his prejudices.

The Toronto Star
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

Brian Bedford the real hero

Superb direction of Coriolanus builds spine-tingling production

by Gina Mallet

STRATFORD -- The Stratford Festival was jolted alive last night with a big, noisy, macho production of Coriolanus that set the Festival Theatre pulsating.

Shakespeare's coldly objective study of Roman realpolitik has been fused into a hot clash of caste and class warfare, with plebeians and patricians, not to mention barbarians, fighting it out all over the stage and into the aisles.

Coriolanus is politics in the raw -- the machinations of demagogues combining with powermongers' manipulations to bring Rome itself to its knees. And in this production, which has been directed with a tingling intensity by Brian Bedford, the politics are all bloody bare knuckles.

From the prowling, swarming, threatening Roman mob to Len Cariou's rigidly self-righteous Coriolanus, and from the savagery of the wolf-headed Volscians to their leader Aufidius, played superbly and with the unrelenting pressure of a piledriver by Scott Hylands, Coriolanus, after a shaky start and a certain unevenness, builds unerringly and with increasing excitement to its dire climax.

Large cast

Last year, Bedford's production of Titus Andronicus was one of the season's critical successes. With Coriolanus, a very different kind of play, and only his second production at Stratford, Bedford shows himself to be a master of the Festival's thrust stage, deploying his large cast in and around it with the strategy of a general and the fluidity of a movie maker.

The Festival stage has rarely been used to such effect since Richard III in 1977. And with the same kind of straightforwardness that made Titus so accessible.

Bedford plunges us immediately into the heart of Coriolanus' tumult with a singular effect. In the dark, we hear the sound of the mob panting. The lights go up on a starving Rome deprived of food by the apparently callous ruling class. The centre, personified by Lewis Gordon's compassionate Menenius, cannot hold.

In the manner of labor relations today, the hardliners take over. The peoples' tribunes are ranged against the most intransigent of patricians, Coriolanus, an iron general who believes that democracy will ruin Rome. For saying so, this hero is refused the consulship by the inflamed mob, and banished from Rome.

"There is a world elsewhere," cries Coriolanus as he flees the city that has rejected him. But there isn't. One of the morals of this production is that the whole world is politics; the cut and thrust of deal-making is everywhere, and the man who disdains politics, and its part in human relationships, disdains life.

Coriolanus has in the past sometimes been interpreted to suit particular ideologies; it offers plenty of opportunities to propagandize any party line. But the only true villain is mob psychology, which is seen to betray and distort the best intentions.

Watching Coriolanus is like watching the machinery of politics in action. It isn't a pretty sight. But it is fascinating. While you can't but sympathize with Coriolanus' opinion of democracy as shabby, you can't ignore either his detractors' suspicions of his motivations. By being true to himself only, he appears false to others. He is led into a false relationship with his former enemy, Aufidius, whom he then joins to attack Rome, only to be deterred somewhat surprisingly at the last by his mother.

Least convincing

Amazing, because Coriolanus' capitulation to his mother's pleas turns out to be the least convincing part of this production. Coriolanus is a man's play and never more so than here, and only a Volumnia still more stern and unyielding than her son could seem to be a convincing pleader. Barbara Chilcott is unyielding all right, but she is not overbearing enough, and that makes Aufidius' final jeer that Coriolanus is a mama's boy seem rather too apt. But this doesn't dovetail with what has gone before, namely, a Coriolanus who, once set on a course, cannot be deterred by anyone, any emotion or any ideology.

Otherwise, however, the play proceeds with an inexorable logic. True, some of the intricacies in the political shuffling get lost, but there are so many intricacies in this play that it hardly seems surprising. The main thing is that the play's line remains strong and true throughout.

Cariou takes his time warming up as Coriolanus. He begins so rigidly that one wonders where he can go from there. But by the time Coriolanus is forced to try to play politics with the mob, he has fragmented into ambition, pride and conviction. After he has succumbed to his mother's pleas, Cariou's Coriolanus essays a pathos that further complicates and enriches his performance.

Ultimately, he is a figure of compelling ambiguity, and he is beautifully matched and complemented by Scott Hylands' single-minded Aufidius, the barbarian who stands in ever starker contrast to Coriolanus.

With his angular frame robed in feathers, Hylands is a primitive force that respects only hardness and courage, and when Coriolanus falters, it seems entirely natural that Aufidius will kill him.

There are other outstanding performances: Max Helpmann's Sicinius is a people's tribune who stands comparison to the Teamsters' boss, and Lewis Gordon is both dignified and moving as the civilized Menenius, while Lynne Griffin is only too pathetic as the abandoned Virgilia, Coriolanus' complaisant wife.

Clanging soundscape

Michael Whitfield's lighting is scenery itself; Desmond Heeley's costumes are agreeably undistracting; and Gabriel Charpentier has provided a clanging soundscape which vibrates ominously.

But the evening's hero is really Bedford, who had a large amount of success wrestling with a very intricate play.

Coriolanus:

By William Shakespeare. Directed by Brian Bedford. Designed by Desmond Heeley. Soundscape by Gabriel Charpentier with Marcel de Lambre and Jean Souvageau. Lighting by Michael J. Whitfield. Festival Theatre.

The Beacon Herald
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

Coriolanus' final act performed 'stunningly' says theatre reviewer

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

Len Cariou, returning to the Stratford Festival where he played secondary roles nearly 20 years ago, received a standing ovation Tuesday night at the opening of Coriolanus, directed by Brian Bedford.

More recently a Broadway musical star, with a Tony award for Sweeney Todd, Cariou in the title role led one of the largest casts in recent years on the Stratford stage with Barbara Chilcott as his domineering mother, Lewis Gordon as his friend in the Roman senate and Max Helpmann as one of the tribunes of the people.

The play is rarely performed because of its sprawling battle scenes and other difficulties of staging by anything other than a large company of actors. More than 30 played unnamed parts as soldiers, senators, citizens and the Roman rabble.

The play's story is out of the mists of Roman history. Caius Martius is a powerful commander who leads the Roman army to put down an attack by the neighboring Volscians. For his victory, he is given the name Coriolanus and offered the title of consul of Rome.

But he is too proud to bare his wounds before the common citizenry, as is the custom to win their approval for the consulship.

Denied the consulship, he deserts Rome and joins the Volscians in an attack on Rome until his family appeals to him for mercy. Bending tearfully to his mother, he is denounced by the Volscians as a traitor and is slain.

In Bedford's production, Cariou falls from the stage balcony into the crowd and Caius Martius Coriolanus comes close to being ripped apart. He dies at centre stage with his arms and legs twisted in the form of a swastika.

Bedford, in his fifth season here as an actor and, in this, his second assignment as a director, used the whole festival theatre as his stage. The soldiers and crowds of Romans swarmed up and down the aisles while music and sound swirled around the audience from all sides.

Not all the lines came through clearly as actors let their passions rule over their diction in many of the opening scenes, but the context of the action carried over that difficulty and the final act was stunningly and absorbingly performed.

Desmond Heeley provided a range of Roman togas, patrician and plebian costumes in shades of ivory and autumnal brown. The higher the rank of the person, the lighter the shade -- a help in keeping everyone sorted out. The Volscians were garbed in copper-colored, fringed leathers and furs, looking like savages.

Cariou last appeared here in 1964 and 1965 and accompanied the Stratford company when it went to England to play at the Chicester Festival where the stage is patterned after Stratford's.

Barbara Chilcott, a pioneer and now one of the grand dames of Canadian theatre, has been longer away from Stratford. She appeared here in 1954 and 1955 playing Katharina in The Taming of the Shrew.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The Globe and Mail
Friday, June 19, 1981

Tame Shrew offers a chance to laugh

By Ray Conlogue

STRATFORD -- Novelty interpretations of Shakespeare plays are usually optional, but in the case of The Taming of the Shrew they are obligatory. You can have brainwashed shrews, duplicitous shrews, harlot shrews; any kind of shrew you want except a tamed one. The taming of women is frowned on today.

That's why it was a guilty pleasure to ease into Peter Dews' uncomplicated production of the play at Stratford Wednesday night. There was Kate gaily annihilating herself in the closing speech (the one everybody chokes on), and surely that was that. Wasn't it?

But no. Here at the end returns Christopher Sly, the drunken peasant duped into thinking he was a lord in the opening scene. It was for him that the strolling players performed this Taming of the Shrew, and Dews had made the whole thing look like a sixteenth-century vaudeville entertainment. Tranio had nudged Biondello when the poor clown looked like he had forgotten his lines; a serving girl had dashed on with placards identifying the locale of the next scene; Petruchio waggled his outstretched hands from time to time like a nightclub emcee encouraging applause.

Well and good. But in Shakespeare's play Christopher Sly does not come back at the end. This final scene, in which he wakes up and concludes the whole thing was a dream, is lifted from somebody else's play, an earlier effort called The Taming of a Shrew. It ends with the deluded Sly rushing off to "tame" his ferocious wife -- and no doubt meeting the fate of any man dumb enough to think he rules the roost.

It's a cute "out" from the Shrew dilemma. It lets the whole Shakespeare play be treated as a broad entertainment and whisks it out of the jaws of the problem-making machine. It's on that level that this broad, sprightly and ultimately mindless evening must be enjoyed.

Hence, enter Len Cariou, the pussycat Petruchio. This is Cariou at his most enjoyable, the macho lout softened by supreme self-confidence to the point where he can't be roused to anger. Does Kate dropkick him? Why (ho, ho) he's hoisted himself on a chair and she nearly breaks her toe on its wooden leg. Does she swing a hard object at his cranium? Why (ho, ho) he has deftly ducked, and how much did father Baptista say her dowry was?

Despite the amusing encouragement of Keith Dinicol's bouncing Biondello and Lewis Gordon's agile and prancing servant to Petruchio, Grumio, it took Sharry Flett as Katherine a while to catch on to the comic flavor of the evening. She played the courtship with a grim earnestness that was at odds with the prevailing tone and didn't really fight Petruchio on his own ground. Rather than mocking him, she took him seriously. Rather than amusing disdain, she registered hatred.

The scenes where Petruchio starves and ill-clothes his new wife to break her insolence are tarted up with comic touches that remove their unpleasantness. The dozen servants point the finger of blame in military unison at anybody but themselves, and loveable Grumio dances around the table where Kate is fainting from hunger. Finally she begins to play the game, and here Miss Flett emerges as an actress with comic ability. She agrees to call the sun the moon at Petruchio's command, but she does it with agreeable gamefulness. Her final knee-bending speech was still not quite clear in direction, but at least she had become an asset to the production.

Lewis Gordon's Grumio was great fun, and Barney O'Sullivan as Baptista was dignified yet amusing. Lynne Griffin as the empty-headed but adorable Bianca was both those things, a dizzy send-up of the spoiled pretty girl; but she overdid the flouncing and tongue-sticking-out somewhat.

But by and large the cast contributed amiably to an enjoyable evening at the wife rodeo. This production won't please those who see Shakespeare wrestling with dark questions of the battle of the sexes in this play, but it will delight those who think the issue has been beaten to death and could bear a little laughter. And there may be more of those around than one would think -- of both genders.

Toronto Star
Thursday, June 18, 1981

Shrew without sex is a dud

Particularly when a minor character steals the show

By Gina Mallet

STRATFORD -- Max Helpmann is one of the ornaments of the Stratford Festival company, so naturally it was a great pleasure to see him stride away with The Taming Of The Shrew last night.

When a company member whisks off with a show right under the nose of the likes of Len Cariou, it does seem like an underdog has won one. Not that Helpmann behaves like an underdog. On the contrary, he commands the stage with the authority of an Olivier.

Even though he only has a tiny role, that of Vincentio, father to Lucentio, who is part of one of the most convoluted love tangles in dramatic literature, Helpmann creates with marvelous economy the most enduring character to be seen on stage all evening; an honest, bewildered and grumpy father who refuses to be made fun of.

But what kind of production of the Shrew is this when a minor character in the subplot steals the show? A sexless production, I'm afraid.

A Shrew without sex is like an ocean without water.

Not equals

The problem is that there can be no sexual electricity unless Petruchio and Kate are equals. Here they are not. Cariou is a bully boy of a Petruchio, starting out on what promises to be a long career as a wife beater. Poor Sharry

Flett, once again cast entirely against her style, her charm and her talent, can no more stand up to Mr. Macho than a mouse could roar at a lion. What, pray, is funny about watching that? In fact, watching Flett be cowed by Cariou is about as much fun as watching a slave lick Simon Legree's boots.

There are, however, many distractions that help take attention from Kate and Petruchio, although they are not all by any means as welcome as Max Helpmann.

The director, Peter Dews, has concentrated heavily on the tiresome subplot of Bianca and her tiresome suitors and their tiresome disguises. Even though Shrew is one of the most frequently performed of Shakespeare's plays, I defy anyone to properly sort out the Gromios and Grumios, and sure enough, in this production they are all, servant or master, indistinguishable one from the other, as they dash about the stage creating the impression of ceaseless amusement.

Sing-song voices

Never, not even in Young People's Theatre's epic this past season, have the shenanigans seems quite so endless. Perhaps this is because the cast speaks in a sing-song reminiscent of old-fashioned elocution, the voice rising inevitably at the end of each line. A couple of them are even encouraged to talk baby-talk, notably Lynne Griffin, who makes Bianca so coy that she could curdle fresh milk.

Shakespeare's sexual innuendoes are rendered in quotation marks, with much heavy emphasis, and graphic signals, gestures toward the codpiece and so on. Really, were the Elizabethans so elephantine in their wit, or is it that Dews is worried that we clean, simple-minded innocents of the TV generation won't understand unless it is pounded into us that way back in the 16th century, men and women also told dirty jokes?

The production is earnestly authentic commedia dell'arte. One thought longingly back to the Neptune Theatre's free-for-all Shrew of last winter, which was directed by Denise Coffey as pure mayhem, the jokes transposed to the Maritimes and the fun fast and furious and distinctly fishy.

After all, there are not many memorable lines in Shrew -- if, indeed, it was really written by Shakespeare -- and the play can be tampered with surely at will. At Neptune, of course, there was also a superbly paired Kate and Petruchio, Susan Wright and John Neville conducting a feisty flirtation rather than a long, drawn-out act of humiliation this Stratford Shrew seems to be.

Not that the humiliation seems intentional, exactly. But then, what is the purpose, the shape to this production?

This Shrew looks charming, all soft browns and muted colors, the stage paved with pale pink brick and the balcony decorated by Susan Benson with a leafy arrangement.

Still, the same old question needs to be answered. What made Dews want to direct this play? Why, other than the fact that the Shrew always seems to sell tickets, is this play being done at all when it's done so often everywhere else and was done here only a couple of years ago?

There is no sign that Dews has any special insights to offer, and there are other roles in which it would surely be far more rewarding to see Cariou tackle. And it's not as though there is a crackerjack cast to hand. Frankly, some of the actors seemed not merely unfamiliar with the Festival Theatre stage but with Shakespeare, too.

Barney O'Sullivan seemed to be simply walking through the role of Baptista, and it was distressing to see Lewis Gordon fall back into his Sanford & Son routine as a hyperactive Grumio. But at least he was attempting a character. His colleagues tended to make do with attitudes.

Winnipeg Free Press
June 19, 1981

The Taming of the Shrew takes new twist at festival

By James Nelson
The Canadian Press

STRATFORD, Ont. (CP) -- All that business about a shrewish woman being tamed to serve, love and obey her lordly husband is but the dream of a drunken tinker.

That, at least, is the way the Stratford Festival is presenting Shakespeare's celebrated comedy, The Taming of the Shrew, this season.

Len Cariou won an opening night ovation as the swashbuckling tamer of Sharry Flett as Katharina, a sweet-voiced but sharp-tongued shrew.

Director Peter Dews not only presented the play complete, with the opening scene involving the tinker Christopher Sly -- one that is often cut to shorten the performance -- but added another scene at the end to complete the story of the play within a play.

The story is that Sly falls asleep after a long day at a local tavern, and an unnamed lord puts him to bed with instructions that he is to be treated as a lord when he wakes up. Meanwhile, a troupe of strolling players happens by, and they perform the story of The Taming of the Shrew.

After Katharina has submitted to her husband and the play ends in most accepted versions of the 1590s text, Dews added a scene in which Sly is awakened by a barmaid and goes home to tame his own wife, now that he has learned in his dream how it is done.

Purists might cavil at the country's most honored classical theatre tampering with the works of its master playwright. But Dews, former artistic director of the Chicester Festival in England, has brought the play full circle to a logical conclusion.

The production, which is running in repertory with Moliere's The Misanthrope and Shakespeare's Coriolanus, is lavishly cast and costumed, with villagers at the pub who do nothing all evening long but watch the play.

Cariou, the Winnipeg-born Broadway star, was a reserved but robust Coriolanus Tuesday night, and Wednesday night a dashing, debonaire Petruchio, the man who is willing to marry and tame Katharina for the wealth she has.

Flett is not the tempestuous shrew often portrayed on the stage, but one whose sweet voice and smile just mask her rebellious temper.

She delivers the play's most controversial speech for contemporary women — "I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace, or seek for rule, supremacy and sway when they are bound to serve, love and obey..." -- with a smile that questions Katharina's sincerity.

Perhaps it is best to leave it in doubt. Women's rights advocates have denounced Shakespeare's philosophy as too old-fashioned to believe.

Lynne Griffin is almost more lively than Flett as Katharina's sister, Bianca, but with a gentle, even temper, and Peter Hutt makes a lover for her with a charm and sexuality that are entirely believable.

Desmond Ellis, making his Stratford debut this season, plays Sly with a Scottish brogue, and spends most of the evening in the stage balcony, alternately observing the play, sleeping off his drunkenness and interjecting his comments on the action.

Rod Beattie plays the old Gremio, a vain suitor for Bianca's hand, with welcome comic touches, and Lewis Gordon is a sprightly if middle-aged fool and servant to Petruchio.

The only stage set is a tree in fall colors spreading over the brick patio of the village pub. Designer Susan Benson provided Elizabethan costumes in autumnal colors so consistently as to give the production a golden hue, lacking in much contrast.

The Taming of the Shrew is the only one of the four productions opened by the festival this week which is scheduled to remain in the repertory throughout the season and into the fall when it will be played for school audiences until Oct. 31.

H. M. S. PINAFORE

The Globe and Mail
Tuesday, June 16, 1981

Stratford's Pinafore wallows

By Ray Conlogue

STRATFORD -- H.M.S. Pinafore opened the Stratford Festival's 28th season yesterday afternoon -- an able enough launching, although it was impossible not to notice the barnacles on the keel of this particular vessel. Leon Major should have been the ideal director for a revival of Gilbert and Sullivan's spoof. He knows opera direction inside and out, and is happiest on the non-musical stage with farce and comic business. What better combination for operetta?

But abilities from different venues can work against each other. The opera director in Major went primarily after voices: Michael Burgess as the Pinafore's captain; Katherine Terrell as his daughter, Josephine; and James McLean as Ralph Rackstraw, the humble seaman who falls in love with her although she is "above his station." All three together do not have enough stage presence to set off a smoke detector.

What they have, and that in abundance, is glorious voices. McLean sings that musical antimacassar, The Nightingale Sighed for the Moon's Bright Ray, with pleasant clarity and vigor, nicely underscored by the director's old tricks of crowd choreography: the mass of sailors tiptoe back and forth rhythm with the ebb and flow of poor Rackstraw's socially inappropriate passion. But he acts not a note of the song. Burgess as the captain, and also as an opera singer with a track record as a legitimate actor, tries harder to underline his solos, but no matter how big his facial expressions become they do not compensate for a simple and ineluctable lack of presence.

Miss Terrell as Josephine presents a different problem. Where the two men, and most of the other soloists, strive to leave out the bel canto frills and go for lucid phrasing, Miss Terrell plunges in as if she were singing Lucia di Lammermoor. Most of the time she sounds simply inappropriate, as if a high-minded Admiralty had sent a diva instead of a doxy to entertain the men. By happy accident she has The Hours Creep on Apace, the orchestration of which sounds like a spoof of grand opera pretensions; here her shapely tones are a perfect complement to the music.

This discussion of the singing style is appropriate because it underlines Major's decision to go for a "straight" version of Pinafore, rather than a spoof such as Joe Papp's now-famous Pirates of Penzance in New York. But to speak of straight Gilbert and Sullivan is misleading, because they were mild social satirists in their own day. What Papp has done is a spoof of a spoof, in recognition of the fact that the original spoof has grown weak with time. Major has gone the other route: to glorify the musical values (which suffer greatly in Papp's production) at the expense of theatre value.

That may be why so much of the individual comic business, usually fluid and building to an amusing frenzy in other Major productions, simply goes flat. Jim White as the "unable able seaman" is funny enough getting caught in the rigging, but the rest of the sailors don't have the confidence to underline and build on the visual joke.

Not that the production doesn't have its strengths. The one strength constantly before our eyes is Murray Laufer's wonderful set, a confection of a ship of the line, with tiny Corinthian columns in front of the cabin doors and dowelled rigging for the sailors to climb. Astrid Janson's costumes are bright and assertive, and Michael Whitfield's lighting cheery if literal-minded (you notice the wattage shifting down every time Dick Deadeye appears).

The show is not without strong performers. What a relief to see Eric Donkin as the bluestockinged admiral who lusts after Josephine. He is the Colonel Blimp without whom no G & S can be complete, and his limp-wristed "Oh, ahoy!" to a tardy minion drew an effortless laugh. He has a pleasant voice, but it is in no way equal to the demands of the music. Happily, however, in this one case the director has traded off musical excellence for a genteel, lightly daffy performance, which is essential to counteract the prettiness of the rest of the cast.

Speaking of prettiness, couldn't they have found somebody really ugly for Dick Deadeye? Avo Kittask, minus the humpback, could probably play the captain better than Burgess. His operatic background seems to include a few buffo roles, but the villain in a show like this needs to be excessive and snarly in a way that no operatic clown is likely to be.

Many of these quibbles were highlighted by a general lack of ease, a sense of working too hard for laughs, in the opening performance. As Pinafore eases into its run it will no doubt enjoy itself more, but it remains a clear, true, and somewhat excessively bright banner to summon the true Gilbert and Sullivan believers. It is not likely to attract the unconverted.

The Toronto Star
Tuesday, June 16, 1981

Pinafore sunk by ponderous reverence

By Gina Mallet

STRATFORD -- Is Wonderland the future of the Stratford Festival?

This ominous notion was suggested yesterday when the beleaguered festival's 29th season opened in a welter of garish and lavish decoration -- and reports of the actors being offended by the festival's advertising campaign which has honkytonk overtones.

Well, hie over to the Avon and see what they mean. The theatre's brick facade has been blanketed with vulgar decorations of a vaguely nautical kind, while inside the theatre the huge aft deck of a barque, snarled in a million knots no sailor ever knew, is filled with costumes designed in Dayglo colors.

If, in fact, Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore were not so well-known, and the score not so precisely and affectionately rendered by music director Berthold Carriere and a splendid cast of singers, the show might be mistaken for Shirley Temple's Good Ship Lollipop.

No such luck

Now, don't get the impression that this Pinafore in any way resembles the wild, anarchic eclecticism of the New York Shakespeare Festival's Pirates of Penzance, which used pop singers as stars. No such luck. There, for all the liberties taken with G & S, and some horrendous howlers as well, Pirates' larky spirit came through loud and strong. G & S take almost anything, topical updating, fooling around, terrible singing, even orchestral sludge, and still retain their Victorian charm and dignity, not to mention their iconoclastic zest, as countless amateur productions prove. They could undoubtedly survive the Avon, too. What they can't take, however, is reverence.

Stratford's Pinafore is about as electric as a church service. You might think that the D'Oyly Carte copyrights -- which immured G & S so long in an anachronistic housestyle -- were alive and well this side of the Atlantic. That is a shocking thing to have to say when you consider that it was Tyrone Guthrie's production of Pinafore for the Stratford Festival that turned London's West End on its ear in the early '60s. Those times have certainly passed.

Leon Major directs Pinafore with a ponderous literalism that is embodied by Murray Laufer's model ship of a set, which allows little space for any attractive movement, and which immediately deep-sixes Gilbert's cheeky irony at the expense of England's defence establishment.

You'd never know from this production that Gilbert drew blood with his brand of satire, that his claws were very sharp when he set about savaging contemporary politicians and social mores. You'd never know that although it does seem terribly funny that poor little Buttercup mixed up a couple of babies in their cradle, the result is cruel; the captain is demoted to a tar, while Ralph Rakestraw inherits the Captain's stripes.

Major's Pinafore is simply a childish fantasy, without social context and without much character. A bland democracy shrouds this love story, which is done and undone by caste and class. There is no sharp sense of the deprivation incurred by such distinctions, yet it is from the knowledge and awareness of such deprivation that the highest comedy comes.

The crew spend their time grinning at the audience. Yet there have been wonderful productions where the crew were a truly rum lot. Guthrie, for example, had Dick Dead Eye doing petit-point, a marvellous and accurate piece of social observation. But Major eschews work on character, depending instead on mechanical tricks, like swinging Buttercup aboard on a bosun's chair.

Perhaps he has conceived Pinafore more as an opera than as a musical comedy. This would explain why there is not a single piece of admirable acting to be seen on stage. While the cast do indeed sing well, that is quite simply not enough. You can hear fine Pinafore performances on records. What is needed is the bravura gusto of large-scale musical comedy performances that make the characters set out and shine in their roles.

Joke's in Gilbert's lines

Patricia Kern is only kindly as Buttercup; James McLean is merely nice as dashing Ralph Rakestraw; Michael Burgess has no authority as the Captain; while Katherine Terrell's Josephine is pert rather than a melting heroine.

Avo Kittask's Dick Dead Eye is about as menacing as a pussy cat.

Eric Donkin should have saved the sinking Pinafore with Sir Joseph Porter, the magnate turned ruler of the Queen's Navee, but instead he chose to send Miss Rosalind Drool along to fill the part. Now, it may be tempting to camp up Sir Joseph, but it isn't half as funny as simply playing him straight. The joke is not in his idiosyncrasy but in Gilbert's lines.

I have to add that my appreciation of the show was marred by the fact that I could not see, without assuming a sort of running crouch position at the front of the stage. Something has happened to the Avon Theatre which makes the front row balcony no longer a desirable location.

H.M.S. Pinafore
Book by W.S. Gilbert. Music by Arthur Sullivan. Musical direction by Berthold Carriere. Directed by Leon Major. Choreography by Judith Marcuse. Set by Murray Laufer. Costumes by Astrid Janson. Lighting by Michael J. Whitfield. Avon Theatre, Stratford Festival.

The Beacon Herald
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

Critic calls H.M.S. Pinafore a fun-filled production

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

A joyously sunny and fun-filled production of Gilbert and Sullivan's spoof of British officialdom and naval tradition, H.M.S. Pinafore, opened the Stratford Festival Monday at the 1,000-seat Avon Theatre.

Eric Donkin, the seasoned comic character actor who recently toured his one man-one woman show, the Wonderfull World of Sarah Binks, made Sir Joseph Porter, KCB, into a wonderful fop, whose official pronouncement that love levels all ranks proves a turning point in the ridiculous plot.

Michael Burgess was a stalwart and sedate Capt. Corcoran, commander of the Pinafore, and Patricia Kern was the full-voiced Portsmouth bumboat woman, Little Buttercup.

The principal love story parts were sung by Katherine Terrell and Josephine and James McLean as Ralph Rackstraw, the lowly seaman who aspires to marry his captain's daughter.

Love may not in fact level all ranks, but it all works out when Buttercup confesses she confused two youngsters -- Corcoran and Rackstraw -- many years before when she practiced baby farming.

Director Leon Major stripped away hoary old staging traditions, grown primarily out of the D'Oyle Carte productions of Pinafore, and replaced them with new bits of foolery. Designer

Astrid Janson provided new blue, white and pink costumes bringing a fresh air to the old Victorian operetta.

Janson's work even extended into the orchestra pit, where the players were costumed as British tars, and conductor Bertrhold Carrier decked out in officer's braid.

It is the first time the Stratford Festival has mounted a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta since the early 1960s.

While the Savoy operas have fallen out of fashion -- mainly because of their Britishness, perhaps -- this one is a bright revival.

The chorus of sailors is robust, the chorus of Sir Joseph Porter's sisters, cousins and aunts "whom he numbers by the dozens" light and frivolous. Judith Marcuse choreographed the show with what can pass wittily for sailor's hornpipes.

CLIVE BARNES

New York Post
Saturday, July 11, 1981

Stratford Fest alive and well

By Clive Barnes

After all the alarms and excursions, the incredible thing is that Stratford's 29th Festival in Ontario actually opened.

The Festival's Board of Directors, having messed around interminably and almost unforgivably, in providing a replacement for the outgoing artistic director, Robin Phillips, was entirely to blame. After such tergiversations that would even make a Canadian Government blush, they eventually emerged with John Hirsch as artistic director and Muriel Sherrin as producer. The two have done a miraculous job getting the company together and putting a season on.

In the second stanzas almost any season would have literally been a miracle. The fact is that the first three productions on the main festival's stage were all more than creditable, and one, Brian Bedford's staging of Coriolanus, got Hirsch's first season off to a flying start.

The company that Hirsch and Miss Sherrin have got together is strictly in the Stratford tradition, and it marks not only the return of Bedford, but also the long-delayed reappearance of one of Canada's major actors, Len Cariou.

Cariou appeared in the leading roles of The Taming of the Shrew and Coriolanus.

He has rarely been seen as a classical actor -- although I first saw him in minor roles with the same Stratford company in 1964, in Chichester, England. In intervening years, Cariou had become a major actor, but his opportunities for classic roles have been somewhat limited.

This time his return to Stratford has proved a triumphant reassertion of his classic talent. In his roles as Petruchio and Coriolanus he shows a range of Shakespearean style that was simply handsome in its depth. Cariou is an actor who continually tries to spread his wings. His rambunctious Petruchio was a perfect complement for his heroically proud and arrogant Coriolanus, both showing the diversity, comic and heroic of Shakespeare's wild-ranging protagonists.

In a sense, it seems to be a man's world at Stratford this season. In the other first production, Moliere's The Misanthrope, it was Bedford and a wonderfully restrained Nicholas Pennell who took the principal honors.

The general mettle of the acting has, however, been unexpectedly high in the special circumstances of the Company's engagement and rehearsal time. Scott Hylands, in The Misanthrope and in Coriolanus, provides a double performance of engaging variety.

Hirsch himself has elected not to direct any of this season's performances and simply to supervise the general festival perspective. His wisdom has been justified in his choice of directors.

Jean Gascon, a former artistic director at Stratford, has provided an elegantly traditional version of the Moliere, and Peter Dews offers a Shrew that makes no concessions for Shakespeare's admittedly anti-feminist views.

It is a positive and boisterous view of the play in which Sharry Flett plays a Katarina with splendid aplomb. She is less successful in the more subtly graduated role of Celimene in the Moliere.

The Shrew and The Misanthrope are most decently staged and for the most part finely acted, and both strike a superior visual impression.

There is no doubt that this company still, frankly against most serious probability, is maintaining its rank of one of the three great English-speaking classic theaters, together with Britain's National Theater and its Royal Shakespeare Company, and it effortlessly demonstrated this in Bedford's sensational rendering of Coriolanus.

Bedford, closely associated with the Stratford Festival, has only previously directed Titus Andronicus. Here he gives Shakespeare's tragic image of arrogant heroism with a flair that sets the seal together with Cariou's performance, on the first productions of this new festival management.

THE CRITICS

HEADNOTE

There is on record the experience of a Mr. K. S. Newman who saw the same play 250 times and wrote a book about it: Two Hundred and Fifty Times I Saw a Play. Bernard Shaw, noting the achievement, said the experience "would have driven me mad; and I am not sure that the author came out of it without a slight derangement."[42] Although he regarded the ideal theatre as

> A factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social consciousness, an armoury against despair and dullness, and a Temple of the Ascent of Man.[43]

Shaw also noted that the drama critic's relationship with the Temple could be mundane. Nathan Cohen quoted Shaw as saying:

> To a professional critic theatre-going is the curse of Adam; the play is the evil he is paid to endure in the sweat of his brow; the sooner it's over, the better.[44]

For his own part, Cohen allowed, with mordant mock-ingenuousness:

> I invariably go to a play in a spirit of optimism. I have my periods of depression...but as a rule, when the lights dim and the curtain goes up I get a choking sensation in my throat and a sense of quivering anticipation. Every playgoer will recognize the symptoms; they are typical of the incurable theatre-lover. To me, a play, no matter who puts it on, and no matter what it is about...always has something to offer. The director and the cast may do their best to

> discourage me, but I stay hopeful to the bitter end. In my profession, idealism is both a sedative and a salvation.[45]

A critical focus on the drama may be as broad or as narrowly defined as the critic chooses to make it. Levitt, the structural critic, says that

> Ideally, each scene in a play is performing a specific function. It is for us to determine what that function is, and to decide if it is purposeful, inevitable, necessary, effective, irrelevant, or what, remembering that scenes are called into existence to serve character, theme, plot or some combination of these.[46]

Levitt provides an example of this type of criticism later in his book, discussing the role of literary rhythm in drama:

> It is characteristic of Carson McCullers' superb literary skill that the structure reinforces the content. The recurrence and reversal pattern in the play corresponds to the sudden changes in life which affect the characters and gives The Member of the Wedding its haunting rhythm and lyrical quality.[47]

Walter Kerr, the intuitionistic critic, took a view, on the other hand, that advocated examining a play much more extensively, while also probing more deeply for its meaning. Advising would-be playwrights, he indicated what should be in a play, and, by inference,what a critic should look for and how:

> Try to see what the audience sees and is inarticulate about. (Allow) that the audience has an intuitive capacity for recognizing what is true. Allow that this truth exists not in the dramatist's

> mind alone, nor even in the audience's mind alone, but...in a third place outside both -- in human behavior itself...The measure of any play will be taken by the number, and the depth, of the truths it does so offer.[48]

George Jean Nathan saw the task of drama criticism as a drama in itself:

> Dramatic criticism, at its best, is the adventure of an intelligence among emotions. The chief end of drama is the enkindling of emotions; the chief end of dramatic criticism is to rush into the burning building and rescue the metaphysical weaklings who are wont to be overcome by the first faint whiffs of smoke.[49]

By a contrast, Nathan Cohen expressed a more practical approach to the critic's function:

> It seems to me that a critic must unite three qualities in his work: a love and understanding of his medium; an ability to probe for the play's underlying value -- (what does the play have to say? How is it said?) -- and, finally, a desire to see a play performed as well as possible, never settling for less. If it falls short of the standard he has set up, then he must point out this fact and indicate concretely how, in his opinion -- for it is always his opinion -- the production could have been improved.[50]

The foregoing observations on the critic's role were written and uttered over the last 60 years, Cohen's at a time when theatre in Canada had not, or was about to, or had just, as used regularly to be observed at the time, "come of age," and so his comments have, in addition to a shade of the acerbity for which he was famous, an avuncular tinge to them of responsibility for nurturing culture. This is one of the themes discussed, and disagreed upon, by Mr. Conlogue, Ms. Mallet and Mr. Nelson, whose interviews with the author are reported on the following pages.

RAY CONLOGUE

RAY CONLOGUE

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Interviewed at the Park Plaza Hotel, Toronto

on

February 26, 1982

MacF: *Do you believe that a daily newspaper theatre critic provides a service to readers? If so, could you describe the service?*

CONLOGUE: Well, I think that service in the minds of my editors essentially is a kind of consumer report. I don't think the editor sees my task as any different from that of Ellen Roseman, for example. She advises the public which kind of diapers to buy and I advise the public which kind of theatre to buy. To me, that's not a very satisfying job description. I like to believe that at least a portion of the readership is challenged by what I have to say about the theatre. I even like to think that if I pan a show there are a certain number of people who will deliberately go and see it.

MacF: *Because they have come to recognize you as a yardstick, whether or not they agree with you.*

CONLOGUE: Exactly. And I also like to think, particularly in relationship to my particular audience in this city at this particular historical moment, that I fulfill an educative function, because I know that Torontonians by and large have not seen theatre. And so I think of myself as creating an audience for something that I believe in. Now that's part of my idea of what the job is. It may be no part of my newspaper's idea.

MacF: *Do you think that theatre criticism enjoys a high readership in your newspaper?*

CONLOGUE: I've been told that we've conducted some survey in this matter, although I don't think it was very extensive or scientific, and that our section was found to be highest in readership immediately after the Report on Business which, of course, is my particular newspaper's *raison d'être* and no surprise, and then after the sports section, which again is no surprise. What was a surprise was that we apparently run rather close to the sports section, and that certainly wouldn't have been the case five or ten years ago. I think it's an increasing readership because of the changing nature of Toronto, the way that the city thinks about itself. There are more people with the leisure and the inclination to want to pursue so called "cultural activities." Partly it's a peer group thing. In some circles it has become the thing to do, to know what's going on at the theatre and that's a very healthy development. I would like to know more exactly what kind of readership we have. I would like to know within my department how I am read versus how the rock music writer or the film critic is read, and about that I have relatively little notion. We don't get much direct reaction from readers, very few letters to the editor. Certain issues provoke the public: the Stratford Festival, last year, for example, provoked a torrent of letters, but by and large I don't get that feedback and I miss it because I would like to know what people think of what I am writing. I am able to be influenced; I am not a Napoleonic critic, but one almost has no choice.

MacF: *How does your approach to theatre criticism fit within your paper's editorial philosophy?*

CONLOGUE: Well, the Globe and Mail considers itself to be a writer's newspaper. Which means that we don't impose a style on individual writers in the manner that many newspapers do. The rationale being that, where somebody might buy another newspaper because they know what to expect, they would buy us because there would be certain writers whose styles they would follow and they would expect those writers to be different from other writers on the paper. So,to that extent,I'm allowed to function in a relatively untrammeled fashion. My newspaper, for example, there is no doubt, is a conservative-oriented newspaper, but I personally am rather left-wing in my thinking. As a theatre critic, I would consider it highly unethical to impose my political viewpoint on the material I cover, but there is no doubt on a certain other level that I would have sympathy for certain kinds of plays which the people in the head office of the newspaper wouldn't. And I have never experienced any harassment or difficulty on this matter.

MacF: *Does your critical/intellectual style conform to one or another orthodox category of criticism: sociological, formalistic, psychological, etc.? Or do you find that elements of several critical approaches are present in your work?*

CONLOGUE: Well,I think of necessity there have to be several elements present in my work because, to begin with, as a theatre critic, I very often have to review plays of a genre, for example, that I don't particularly enjoy. But I don't think its sufficient for me to simply pan every play which is, for example, a musical or a dinner-theatre review. I have, paradoxically, to go outside of myself on occasion to review these productions strictly from the standpoint of the proficiency of the performers, the technique, the pace of the direction and so on, and say: yes this is a good production, and not mention it's a production I can't possibly enjoy -- just because of what it is. One of the most perceptive things I've ever read was that the difference between an artist and a critic was that a critic can't afford to be as narrow-minded as an artist. So there is that element of self abnegation that's involved in it. Given that -- what I think of as a demand for flexibility in the terms of the kind of material I am talking about -- I think it would be very inappropriate for me then to superimpose on that a strict critical canon, i.e., formalistic or sociological. I would never, for example, see my job as a podium, or, more to the point, a kind of industrial process, wherein I will take all the amazing variety of theatre which I see, and process it through a social-relevance machine, or a formal-structure machine, or...you know, that would be cheating my readership -- and God, would make my job dull after awhile!

MacF: *Is there a convention concerning the role of the newspaper critic that is tacitly observed by both critic and reader? For instance, is the critic supposed to be giving useful guidance to the* *theatrical people, and the newspaper's readers observing the process over his/her shoulder? Is the critic supposed to be the audience's advocate in seeking entertainments of a certain standard? What do you see as the conventional, or mythical, relationship among critic, audience, theatre and reader? How does it relate to the reality of daily newspaper criticism?*

CONLOGUE: Now that's a fascinating question and it's very much to the point. I think that the people who hired me think of me as a journalist who happens to write about the theatre. I think of myself as a theatre person who happens to work for a newspaper. This is one of the deep secrets of my attitude toward my job. That does apply to your question in the sense that, as a theatre person, I want to be speaking to the theatre community as well as to my readership. I think I try to speak to both. I speak to my readers in the sense that I look for a hook in my lead, the way any writer would; I want people to read this review who don't go to the theatre. I want them to not be able to resist my prose. I invariably provide some kind of idea of the plot of the play,even though snobbish critics have said to me that you can always tell a beginning theatre critic because he summarizes the plots of Shakespeare. I consider that insufferable. I'm speaking every day to a potential audience of 300,000 people. I'm sure that most of them don't know or remember the plot of All's Well That Ends Well and I resent that kind of elitism. I think it is improper at any time, and it's certainly improper in a city which has only about a 15 or 20-year tradition of live theatre. So I'm trying to speak not only to my readership, but to an untutored readership who, I think, are intelligent enough that, if this is placed in front of them, will become interested in it. At the same time, if, in a given production, there is a particularly knotty formal problem in terms of acting or presenting material in hand, I try to say things that would be of use to the theatre people who are performing it. If I have to write a negative review of a play which is very difficult to perform, I want those people to know that I admire the effort that they've made, and that perhaps if this project were to be attempted again, then here is a way that one might try to approach it. When I'm writing that way, I think I'm probably writing fairly opaquely from the standpoint of the general readership. So I try to restrict that kind of writing. I don't put a quantity on it, but I would say that if I was occupying more than a third of any given review with that kind of commentary, I would be doing a disservice to my readership. So you see, I'm walking a kind of tightrope there. I don't invariably think that I am writing for my readership or for the theatre community. It's a shifting thing and I tend to be aware of when I am changing my address.

MacF: *How do you approach a production? What are you looking for? How did you arrive at these criteria?*

CONLOGUE: That's a very tough question. Well one thing I don't do, I don't ever look at the title of the play and think, "My God, why are they putting on that turkey?" Because I've been surprised often enough by a director that had a passion for a particular play that I never thought should have been staged and did a brilliant job of it. So, chastened by now, I try never to prejudge. For example, a favorite topic among critics right now is: "What the hell is John Hirsch up to at Stratford?" Look at this season he is going to be doing this summer. What I have to say to my colleagues over and over again is: I don't know anything about this season until I see it. You have to give the artist credit for a certain amount of ingenuity. However, that aside, there are certain kinds of theatre, dinner-theatre, for example, which I know are going to be a particularly predictable kind of theatre, and in going to those shows I have to prepare myself, basically I guess, by not having my expectations too high. I don't expect to be challenged or provoked or surprised by what I see. When I'm going to a very experimental or off-the-wall kind of production, I often have to prepare myself by telling the editor that I won't write until the following day because it may be that what I'm seeing is too misbegotten to be worth revealing. I'm sure that's coming to the crux of your question about how I prepare myself. I don't think that I prepare myself in the way Stanislavsky asked an actor to prepare himself. I don't sort of sit and meditate for fifteen minutes before I go in there. I certainly prepare myself by not drinking more than one glass of wine. Bibulousness is a problem among critics. I've had playwrights tell me that they really didn't know how the critics were viewing their play until they had four glasses of wine and they went and saw it themselves and said, "My God, you *do* fall asleep in the second act!" (which reflects the opinion that the theatre community may have of critics by and large). No, I tend to simply go. Very often my schedule is too hectic to allow me to prepare myself. I often find myself, for example, racing directly from an interview to the theatre with nothing but cab time between. I'm often sitting in the theatre having been doing something completely different ten to fifteen minutes before. And that probably is not ideal.

MacF: *That's probably very hard on you.*

CONLOGUE: It is very hard on me. If I've had a very emotionally exhausting encounter with anybody, whether on a personal or professional level, I find that coming into my mind as I'm sitting looking at the play. That's only human. One would like, ideally, to work in a more leisurely context, but that is the province of the weekly or the academic theatre critic, not of the daily theatre critic.

MacF: *How do you turn off the day and turn on the play?*

CONLOGUE: Well, when I go into the theatre, if there has been anything distracting me from what I'm seeing, I sometimes have to perform a certain conscious exercise on myself -- which is, say, to look at a particular performer on the stage and just settle myself and take a deep breath and say: okay, I'm anybody else in this theatre right now. What does that person look like to me? And that, on some occasions, has to be done as a conscious effort of will. It's an effort to shove aside the detritus of the day - whatever may have happened immediately before.

MacF: *You start with whatever knowledge and experience you've acquired in your life...and on top of that there's what happened to you that day. Is there some kind of automatic system waiting for you that allows the knowledge and experience to emerge through the daily flotsam?*

CONLOGUE: The matter of the interior resources which are brought to bear -- they are there. I see 250 plays a year. This immediately puts me in a different mind frame than anybody else in the theatre. Nobody else sees 250 plays a year. I see them in a variety of places. I get to New York every few months. I get to London once a year. I travel all around this country. I dip into the American regionals from time to time. I even managed to get to Berlin last spring. When you have that kind of background,it brings a whole set of resources to bear. What may seem terribly novel to the spectator in the audience,you may know very well to be something which is part of the currency of contemporary theatre elsewhere, and you know that the director has borrowed it. So that is going to affect the way you are going to evaluate it. The other person in the audience will say, "God, isn't that wonderful."

MacF: *Colored lighting!*

CONLOGUE: Yes, colored lighting. People dancing through their curtain call! But you've seen six productions in the previous year where people dance through their curtain call.

MacF: *That brings up an interesting point. There's a line between being jaded and being experienced I would think. You've got to watch you aren't saying, "Oh for God's sake, another elephant. I've seen an elephant."*

CONLOGUE: Yes, exactly. For which reason I think nobody should be a theatre critic all their life.

MacF: *What do you do with an old theatre critic then?*

CONLOGUE: Well one hopes never to become that old in the job. I would think it a failure in myself if I was still doing this job ten years from now, because I feel I would be jaded at that point. It's a difficult question; it was just pointed out to me recently that I have only just begun to write worthwhile theatre criticism, having been on the job for three years. And this was an honest evaluation which I think was probably right. I think it takes at least that long for one to immerse oneself and to get a handle on what is going on. And it would seem a shame to throw away that hard won expertise by saying I've been doing this a long enough time for me to move along to something else. I think the healthiest solution to the problem is that adopted by critics like Harold Clurman, who was also a noted theatre director. He interspersed those two careers: he did one for a while and then the other.

MacF: *Walter Kerr.*

CONLOGUE: Yes and Walter Kerr was also a director, from time to time. Many of the better critics in fact have been theatre practitioners and used criticism as a way of stepping outside to get a perspective on their work themselves. I find that these are often the best, the most humane, the most insightful critics. I was an aspiring actor at one time and was told that I could have been trained to be a professional actor, but didn't do it. It's very much on my mind now that I would like to work in the theatre in some capacity for a while and then go back to being a critic. In a nascent theatre community such as we have in Canada this is a difficult thing. Editors, for example, may not understand the necessity of this. My editors are not the editors of The New York Times, who have been dealing for generations with this kind of problem. To my editors, all that matters is that I've been there long enough that they have an investment in my name. They assume it's recognizable to the readers. If I say that I want to go away for a couple of years and do something else they are very likely to say: "Well, that just means that we have to train somebody else. Please don't bother coming back."

MacF: *I would have thought that if you had a critic capable and willing to do something interesting, you'd say, "Go ahead, God bless you."*

CONLOGUE: Well, it does create problems and the thing is that, essentially, the editors would have to come to understand that the long-term value would exceed the inconvenience. But let's face it, most newspaper people don't go to the theatre.

MacF: *Yet, it's the same as saying to the academic, "You'd be a hell of a lot better off if you went back and worked in the newsroom for a year" -- and I would, no question about it. I can't imagine it doesn't work equally well the other way...take someone out of the newspaper and put him in the theatre. It certainly could enhance and refresh him and his credibility.*

When you write a critical piece, what do you intend it to do? Is the piece supposed to function at more than one level? What purpose(s) does it serve?

CONLOGUE: What one always wants is to imagine that one has written a deathless piece which will be reproduced in anthologies of theatre criticism for a long time. But, occasionally, on those rare evenings when you come to a play which happens to fit in with matters that you have been thinking about yourself, and you find that you have a great deal to say, and that you are prepared to say it, and that it comes out rather elegantly -- you think: My God, despite the odds and the limitations of my situation (which is that I have to write this thing in 60 minutes). I've managed to write a first-rate piece of theatre criticism. Now given the limitations of the daily newspaper régime, that has to be an adventitious occurrence. You can't count on it. You can't be like a weekly or monthly reviewer who can choose which play to write about, for example (I have to write about all of them) who can choose to spend a certain amount of time prepping and doing background reading. (I can never do that, not realistically: I might grab an hour in the public library in the afternoon and that's it.) So I can't count on writing what I would consider to be first-rate theatre criticism, and sometimes I think I would be much happier writing for a weekly if there were such a thing in this country. There is exactly one job like that in this country.

MacF: *Whose is that?*

CONLOGUE: MacLean's. So I can't count on that third level I mean. Apart from addressing the readership and the theatre community-addressing posterity, that's pretty much beyond my means.

MacF: *If you read collected daily newspaper theatre criticism, I'd say the level is higher now. If you go back twenty years in Canada you'd find only a few people writing up to the level you people are writing at now.*

CONLOGUE: Yes, in terms of expertise and also the fact that the newspaper is willing to pay somebody full time to do that.

MacF: *Also, in the States, where they had a lot of theatre back then, the level of collective criticism that I read from daily newspapers of the time is by no means shockingly better than [illegible] I am reading every day now in large Canadian newspapers.*

CONLOGUE: In examining the common run of critics of thirty or forty years ago, you're probably right. I'm not particularly impressed when I read say Brooks Atkinson over the years, although he was a good critic and those stood as good criticism when they were written. No, I think that's probably true. I'm often intrigued though by the few really great critics such as George Bernard Shaw.

MacF: *That's a question I wanted to ask -- which ones you admire, and then, second part, if there are one or more particular individuals who have influenced you in your work.*

CONLOGUE: Well, yes. The paradox is that the ones I admire and the ones that influenced me are not necessarily the same. I admire George Bernard Shaw a great deal, but I think that to do that kind of criticism now would be destructive, because I think that the experience of the twentieth century has been that of canon of artistic creation shattered. You no longer say to a writer: "Write a realistic play," or: "Write a three-act or a five-act play." That kind of criticism which is unspeakably ludicrous after Beckett and Artaud and everybody else -- who showed the silliness of those conventions. Those conventions are now options. You can use them as a writer, as a creator, if you want and you can use them to achieve certain effects. If you want to achieve certain other equally desirable effects you don't use those conventions. Somebody like Shaw would be very unhappy writing as a theatre critic now because,essentially,he was the theatre critic imperator,you know: pointing the way for the readership and the theatre community toward some...ideal Ibsen on the hilltop: that's where we're going. In his time, that made perfect sense, because there was one formalized standard of theatre which had outlived its usefulness and there was every reason to replace it with a new standard of theatre. That was the experience of all of the art forms up until the twentieth century. But that no longer is the case. People in the arts, as in the fashion world, can choose a variety of styles now. So the critic's job now in this day and age is to lend insights; to provoke people to think about what they are seeing; but not to try to dictate conclusions which I think is what critics in the old days tended to do and what critics like Gina Mallet, for example, still tend to do. But I think that that is underestimating the current audience and mistaking their temper,because I don't think that an intelligent readership wants to be led by the nose anymore -- however brilliant the nose-leader may be. The critics that influenced me are people like Harold Clurman who wrote in a more contemporary set, and was a great humanist I think.

That's an interesting thing. I don't see people brining up these aspects of criticism. The personal temperament and intellectual orientation of the critic is very important. A critic I know, for instance, is extremely right-winged, in fact downright authoritarian, (and to that critic) the object is to use the theatre community as raw material in order to impose the critic's own will.

MacF: *Can newspaper criticism itself be criticized? What would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of theatre criticism published in the Toronto Star?*

CONLOGUE: First of all, in evaluating the criticism that appears in the newspaper...what I have to do is separate that material from my knowledge of that critic. I have to overcome very strong feelings of personal dislike. I have seen most of the productions that she has reviewed and I would have to say that,first of all,she is an able critic. She is very knowledgeable about the theatre. When she is reviewing in an unbiased fashion, which is to say, when she is reviewing a production in which there are no actors with whom she is conducting vendettas, in which she has not locked horns with the theatre that is presenting it, and so on and so forth, when she is clear and away from those kinds of entanglements, she can write quite stunning criticism. That, unfortunately, is less than a quarter of the time as far as I can tell. More often,I find it difficult when I read her reviews to recognize the production that I saw. She will dwell at greath length on matters that I find to be peripheral. For example, in reviewing a production last spring, three-quarters of the review was spent reviewing the program notes which were written by the director who is left-wing and who had written a pretty left-wing statement, and she simply stopped at that and talked for three-quarters of her review about these liner notes and summed up the production in the final ten or twelve lines, which I think has nothing to do with theatre criticism at all. I have also noticed that there are some theatres that can do no right in her reviews: In the case of the Free Theatre, I believe she panned something like twelve to fifteen productions in a row. I saw those productions and a number of them were very, very fine. It is also hard to believe that any theatre staffed by professionals produces that many bad productions in a row. So even a person who wasn't privy to background information might well deduce that some kind of vendetta was being conducted. In terms of newspaper functioning...a notorious critic can be an asset to a newspaper. That raises in my mind ethical problems for the newspaper. At what point does the newspaper balance... a particular staffer's carryings-on with its responsibility to the community?

MacF: *Does your power at the box office, or your power to affect the lives of people in the theatre bother you? How do you cope with this?*

CONLOGUE: I'd like to come to that in a moment. I just wanted to say one other thing about this, this business that we were just talking about. I just read an article in the Financial Post[51] , a Duffer's Guide to Theatre, I think it was. It's interesting how that writer, whom I don't know, summed up myself and Gina Mallet. Gina Mallet was nicknamed The Hammer, who was known as a ferocious critic. I was known as a Young and Concerned. Now that is very interesting. Those are two adjectives which I would want to keep a lot of distance between myself -- and...

MacF: *It's too bad, they are perfectly respectable things to be, but in that context...*

CONLOGUE: Exactly. I can't help but think that the tougher aspects of my criticism (and in some respects I'm a very tough critic) would have been noticed by that writer had she not been comparing me to a critic who is (extremely) tough. So I suffer by comparison. As in all things human,the negative is more fascinating than the positive. Everybody reads the Inferno and nobody reads the Paradiso. This is an old conundrum. So the temptation,if one desires fame or celebrity, is to be notorious, and I have no doubt that this is the policy which Miss Mallet is undertaking very deliberately. I don't think it's a critic's task to be famous or notorious. I think a critic's task is to render a service and to be a servant of the art. I realize it sounds very old-fashioned, but it's an old-fashioned quality which we could do with I think. I want to see theatre become a (major force) in this country and I think the only way to do that is to encourage a committed, intelligent, demanding audience. And, for that reason, I try to be a reasonably intelligent and discerning critic. I know that that's going to lose me brownie points in terms of public perception because it's always more difficult to categorize somebody like that than somebody who is simply writing raves or pans -- which again is one way I would describe the theatre reviews I have seen in the Star in the last four or five years.

Most productions in fact deserve mixed reviews. You are dealing with professional people. They are not going to be producing amateur hours. Very few productions in fact deserve to be panned. A pan in my mind is a totally negative review of a production which had no merits. Well, almost any production has at least some merits and I think it's the critic's job to take note of them, however revolted he may have been by the overall project. That's only showing a certain amount of respect to the professionalism of the people involved...Any critic who almost never writes a mixed review is a critic who is trying not to confuse his readership. He is essentially trying to establish in his readership a very strong image of himself, as somebody who is either up there or way down there, and you have no doubt where he is. It's a strong image which the critic is trying to present. And he is presenting it at the cost of the truth. And that to me is the theatrical equivalent of...the unforgivable crime -- to put yourself ahead of the art form to which you are supposedly in service. Unforgivable. It's also dishonest. You're misleading your readership and you know that you're misleading them. So there is that problem. Now we can move on.

MacF: *A lot of this (questionnaire) you've covered. I find (what you've just said) very interesting because there are similarities to other kinds of journalism within criticism, and one of the great problems in any kind of newspaper journalism is the temptation to see things as either totally good or totally bad...you've described very well what I've asked for next -- your philosophy of journalism and your particular ethics of criticism within that philosophy. Is there anything you'd add to that?*

CONLOGUE: I think that a critic has a duty to everybody for whom he is writing not to obtrude his own personal prejudices on his reviews, and this is the matter we touched on briefly earlier, but I think I would like to expand that because it is a problem. Among personal prejudices I would include what I think of as the osmotic process of absorbing currently popular public prejudices. The New York Times reviewer, Frank Rich, may have nothing in particular against Canadians personally, but I believe in his review of several Canadian productions in New York he has reflected the current American disenchantment with Canada. Again, I think a good critic is self-scrutinizing enough not to allow that to happen. I realize that's setting a very high standard -- but what other kind of a standard do you want to set for yourself? There's, besides that, the more difficult problem of personal prejudices of which one may or may not be aware. This can range all the way from the predictable prejudice, anti-semitism for example, not liking black people -- well what, in that case, do you do with a play concerning the Holocaust? What do you do with a play in which the leading actor is Jewish? What do you do when you have to go to a Black Theatre Canada production? What you have to do is what Ibsen said was the task of the writer, which is to sit in judgment on himself. I think it was a very perceptive remark. And a critic is a writer. I think the critic has to try very hard to be honest with himself and to listen to what other people may say about him in respect of his own prejudices. I think all of us to some extent are aware of what our prejudices are, however much we may try to soften or mollify it. I don't think that a critic should indulge in softening or mollifying. The only question should be, first of all given I am aware that I have a problem on this issue or about this ethnic group: Second, can I or can I not overcome that when I review this play? Third, if I can't, I send somebody else to review it. None of that has to be public. You know it can simply be, if there is, anything uncomfortable with it, tactically all you have to do is go to the editor and say: "I'm not feeling well tonight, you'll have to send someone else." You don't have to wear your heart on your sleeve, but I think it's very important that you wear your heart on your heart in this kind of matter. There are thornier prejudicial problems, for example, gender problems, which are very much an issue right now. Half of what you see in the theatre is an examination of sex-role confusion. If you happen to be personally confused about your sex role -- what kind of man am I? Am I macho? Am I this, am I that? Am I dealing with this? Am I angry about feminism? -- or for a female critic all the converse questions...If your own personal development in those things is confused, then you have to somehow put that face-to-face with the issue of the kind of plays you are trying to cover. In this case it is less clear cut. You can't say: "Well, I don't know how I feel about feminism, so I won't review any feminist plays". I don't think that's the answer, but the answer is, I think, in this case, to obtrude yourself on the review so that your reader is alerted. You say, "This play examined the problem with which I have difficulty." I think that it's quite important to do that. It comes under the general rubric of prejudice. Somehow involve your reader in that, and say there is a problem here. I think certain kinds of prejudices are more legitimate than others. I mean, to get back to it, if you just don't like homosexuals, then for heaven's sakes, it's not enough to write a mollifying review, you just shouldn't be reviewing homosexual plays.

MacF: *Unless you want to learn. Surely some biases are amenable to education.*

CONLOGUE: Of course in the theatre, with a bias like that, you've really got

to deal with it or your're not going to be reviewing half the plays that are presented. But there is that as an overwhelming problem. We are all human beings. Each of us carries a certain amount of baggage in terms of prejudice, bias -- however we might like to describe it, and somehow that has to be integrated.
Political bias, to return to that one -- one of the first plays I reviewed as a critic was a production of a Trevor Griffiths play called Occupations, I believe. Trevor Griffiths is a communist, and the play was set in Italy in the 1920s with an envoy of the new Bolshevik regime in Russia addressing himself to an Italian communist on tactics and issues of (the left). I'm an NDP voter, and in this country and in this context, that means that I'm very sensitized on these issues because I represent a minority political viewpoint. I'm not extremely left-wing. I think by European standards I'd be considered pretty wishy-washy. However, I'm going to see a play by a playwright, Trevor Griffiths, with whose political viewpoints I'm basically in perspective although he being working-class British is much more extreme about it than I'm ever liable to be. But I go wanting to explain this writer to my readers, most of whom I imagine are not in sympathy with him, and I don't want him dismissed, because he is a good writer. So I am prejudiced in favor of this writer before I even see this production. Now the production was dreadful. And I panned it. I got a letter from the artistic director a couple of days later saying: "You must be one right-wing son of a bitch." And I was so proud of that letter I've kept it ever since. And I thought, "God, I'm going to be a good theatre critic!"

MacF: *How would you describe your beliefs, your philosophy of journalism? Do you subscribe to a particular ethics of criticism within your philosophy?*

CONLOGUE: Yes that big question. The world view or orientation of the critic. It's a difficult one. I think that in the last generation all of us have become relatively relativistic. I'm starting to sound like Mackenzie King. But I think that in society at large, especially, to rehash part of history since the world wars, there has been a breakdown in formal structures of belief. People who espouse fairly rigid world outlooks which combine political and religious viewpoints tend to set off alarm bells in most of us now because of our experiences, in this century, with the logical extreme of that kind of behavior. In the Globe and Mail right now for example there's a South American organization running advertisements -- The Coalition For Family and Christianity or something -- I don't know if you've seen these. Essentially, they are running large expensive ads decrying the government of France because it's socialist -- in the Globe and Mail in Toronto! Now you take one look at that and you say: "Family, Christianity -- my ass! This is a pack of South American fascists and they've got a lot of money to spend and they don't realize that North Americans aren't that stupid." And likewise, not to be partisan about it, when the dictator of North Korea takes out full-page advertisements in the Globe and Mail they are much more poorly written, but the reaction is identical: "They're trying to take us for idiots."

So I think all of us tended to become somewhat distant from simple, declarative kinds of statements. This is good for the arts because good artists have always been aware of the ambiguity of life, and to some extent even of the hopelessness of finding final solutions, and the measure of a writer is with what degree of compassion and depth can he come to terms with the essential ambiguity of life?

I mean, I think you could call Chaucer an existentialist if you wanted to. It's a trendy word. But good writers have always been existentialists in that they start from ground zero, and they open their eyes and look, and they see it all.

So when you get back to the question of the critic, some critics I suppose are more definite about their beliefs than others. I'm honestly not sure whether this is a good or a bad thing. I think if one is sure of one's beliefs,it enables one to make more definite and well-constructed statements. It gives you a structure of reaction to a work of art. It may be a narrow structure, but at least it's there. The problem of being too existentialist as a critic is that your reviews can look rather formless after a while. At what point do you draw the line? In the theatre today you can see some awfully kinky statements being made. Can you, or do you, draw a line somewhere and say: "This is decadent. Don't go. It stinks. This is a depressing view of human nature. This is a worthless view of human nature." Do you ever come to that point? Well,I have been dragged to that point by a few productions despite my best efforts.

MacF: *It must have been extreme.*

CONLOGUE: It had to be very extreme but it happens every so often and, again, less extreme presentations I kind of take in my stride. I'm reminded...I had a letter from an 80 year-old English lady in Rexdale the other day. It said she was never going to read me again because I had used the word "penis" in one of my reviews. Somebody reminded me that, yes, there are a good number of people out there who think that. And I am so far away from that viewpoint that I didn't even remember that I'd used the word "penis" in that review. So,you find yourself as a critic just being one mote in the flux, and that again comes back to the question of leadership. I mean you can't in all honesty, intellectualize, you can't set yourself up as a dictator of values unless they're production values. Those are the only kind of values I think that the critic ought to be talking about. No -- but that's too narrow.

MacF: *As a critic, unless you are a total formalist, you do obviously begin with a strong sense of the value of individuals, but then there is the fact that not everybody sees this the same way. People have difficult social approaches.*

CONLOGUE: The European tradition of criticism: the left-wing European theatre critic, the right-wing European theatre critic, is, I think, very, very distant from our experience here, and I don't discredit it because I don't understand the societies well enough. I suppose that if the critics are declared advocates of certain viewpoints, then the public can read both or either or none...

MacF: *As a major critic, how do you see your responsibilities (a) to your paper (b) to its readers (c) to a production's management and investors (d) to the professional playwrights, actors and other creative personnel connected with that production?*

CONLOGUE: I'd say I have less responsibility to my newspaper and to the show's investors than I do to the readership and the people on stage. I'm not sure what responsibility to my newspaper means.

MacF: *Some people might say: "I have a responsibility to sell newspapers," for instance.*

CONLOGUE: I don't direct myself to doing that. I do my job as well as I can and if somebody comes to me and says, "Well, nice try but you're not selling newspapers. This is your dismissal notice," well, then that is fine. It's not on my mind. I think I'm working for one of the few newspapers in the country actually which is in the position to afford a luxury like a critic who writes for himself rather than selling newspapers.

MacF: *At least a paper that understands it can afford the luxury. I don't think there are any of them that poor. Next, the question of whether your power at the box office concerns you. And second,* *does it influence what you write?*

CONLOGUE: First of all, I'm not sure how much power I have at the box office. Outside of New York and London, which are the acknowledged theatre centres of the Western world, I think it's a very moot point how much power a print critic has. When I talk to my compatriots from Detroit or Chicago, they don't think they have the power to open or close shows and neither do I. At most, I have the power perhaps to sell or not sell, let's just grab a figure, say 100 tickets a night. Well, obviously, in a 1,000-seat theatre, that's not going to bring anybody to their knees. In a 200-seat theatre it may.

MacF: *Take one of the smaller Toronto experimental theatres. If you say the play is godawful, is that not going to affect whether it stays open a week or two weeks or three weeks?*

CONLOGUE: No, on that level there is, let's say there's a probability. I can't be sure though because the theatre people themselves tell me...for example, there was a production at Passe Muraille a few months ago called Cold Comfort, a very fine show. I wrote a rave of it. I believe it was well reviewed in the Star too. Didn't sell. Just didn't sell. And the converse can also happen. Shows have been panned and gone on to become megahits. The reading public is not as slavishly addicted to theatre critics here as it is, for example, in New York City. And even there you have an aberration because three-quarters of the print power in New York City is in one newspaper and that's been proven by surveys and studies. The other media there have a minimal effect [illegible] the theatre. So that really is an aberrant kind of situ[illegible]. Here I think that the public that goes to see the theatre is still small enough that it's composed mostly of people who by nature are curious and willing to take a chance. That kind of person is going to be less influenced by reviews. When we have a mass theatre-going audience in this city the way we have a mass film-going audience, that is when you have people who just casually go to the theatre, (who) flip open the newspaper and read a review to decide whether or not they are going to go to it -- then you will see the critics having some palpable clout, but that's a long way off.

MacF: *When that happens, and if you haven't gone on to do something else, how will you cope with the fact that what you write could destroy somebody's artistic creation?*

CONLOGUE: I'm never worried about investors because I figure they can afford it. On the other hand, I am aware that the average Equity actor makes less than $5,000 a year. That's why they all work in restaurants. I'm also aware that a lot of them are married and have kids, and if that show closes two weeks early because of my review, then that's two weeks' salary that that guy doesn't have to support his family. I can't help being affected by that, but I don't think I should be. I think the theatre is a very brutal business, and people who enter into it know that it's a brutal business. There's that quote from Ben Johnson: "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give but we that live to please must please to live." That's a tough job description. Not many people have to, essentially, face the fact that, regardless of their professional qualifications, whether they work or not depends on whether they are liked. Doctors don't worry about that, lawyers don't worry about that. So as a critic, and here I think that my duty -- this is the bottom line I guess ultimately -- my duty to the public supersedes that to the theatre community. I simply have to say: "No. It's no good. Don't go." And not think about those actors. That's a professional obligation.

MacF: *Do you think your responsibilities as a critic include encouraging the growth and viability of professional theatre in Canada and Toronto? Is that one of your responsibilities?*

CONLOGUE: Oh I believe it is. You could say from a narrow viewpoint of self-interest. Of course. Creating work for myself. More broadly, yes. I believe that culture is essential to the life of the nation, not peripheral, and I live in a nation in which it is broadly thought to be peripheral. It's a consequence of the youth of the nation and the hiatus in cultural life which is created by the colonial experience, and simply had people leaving their traditions behind and finding themselves in a situation where for several generations they were occupied with survival.

My grandfather lived in a remote part of the country on a farm where he nearly starved to death. He would have a great deal of difficulty understanding my mental outlook. So given that we've only recently, I think, come into a situation in Canada where we can begin to address the question of cultural identity -- I think that it's the bounden duty of cultural workers, of whom I'm one, to open up as much territory as possible.

I don't hesitate to berate Toronto and Toronto theatre-goers, by and large, because I think that given its size and wealth, the city ought to be heard much more loudly in the cultural councils of the world. And it isn't because it is still basically a city which is rather shabbily preoccupied with building bank towers. ... It's a city which can afford to be preoccupied with better things, I think, at this point. It makes me angry when I see this city being left behind by other cities in Canada which are a fraction of its size, but are producing much more interesting theatre. So yes, I see it as my job at that point to sit down and say: "Smarten up." Now somebody else could say right back to me: "Well, screw you. I don't feel like going to the theatre. Who needs that?" And everybody else admittedly can (so) choose. But I believe that that's to choose mediocrity, and I certainly am not going to hesitate to say so. The hortatory function!

MacF: *Are all critics failed future or resting playwrights or performers? Or does criticism in popular newspapers have creative validity of its own?*

CONLOGUE: Well first of all, as you know from what we were saying earlier, not all critics are failed performers -- some of them are successful. You know Harold Clurman is one of the greatest American directors and one of the greatest American theatre critics. Even Kenneth Tynan managed to write part of O Calcutta though I'm not sure he ever did anything else in that line. I think it's true that many critics toyed with the idea of a creative career in the theatre at one point and backed out. They may have tried and failed. More likely, as in my case, they simply never tried because the risks attendant on a theatre career are so great. I think that you have to be thirsty for it. You have to be a personality which desires an impact, couldn't imagine doing anything else, before you would be able to overlook the liabilities of the profession. So, in that sense, you will find many critics who simply backed down. Now the corollary of that question was...

MacF: *Does criticism have creative validity of its own?*

CONLOGUE: Boy, that's a thorny question. Again I don't think that most of the criticism that I do has a creative validity of its own because it's too hastily done. I'm not writing to my full potential as a writer. Criticism in a sort of secure, thoughtful framework, I think, can have creative value of its own. Indeed if you talk to creative people: playwrights, directors, you will very often find that they've been deeply influenced by reading essays in theatre written by people who have been critics and nothing else. So,to that limited extent,it might be a form of creative function. However, I think that nestling inside all of us is a conviction -- you see what I have just said is most influential -- there is also in there an emotional conviction that Brendan Behan was quite right when he said that critics are like eunuchs: they see it being done every night, but they can't do it themselves.

There is this problem. I think that the critic is essentially a journalist and like many journalists, he looks at a novel and says, "Why couldn't I do that?" Because,there is no doubt that, as far as writing is concerned, the creative writer, that is the writer in a designated creative medium, is more esteemed. The creator will always be more esteemed than the commentator, however brilliant the commentator. So I think that almost any critic at some time or other is going to try his hand at writing. I know many critics who have tried to write plays,for example. I haven't tried it myself yet, but I probably will. Because there is the rare critic who manages to write a play. You can always hope that you'll be one of them. But I think the majority quietly tuck it back into the bureau drawer and forget about it after a while. Because it isn't necessarily true that the kind of organizational ability and stylistic endowment that enables one to be a good theatre critic is necessarily going to be conjoined with the ear for dialogue, the sense of structure, and a million other criteria that are necessary to write a good play. The odds are against it.

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MacF: *Can criticism of a production be "right" or "wrong?"*

CONLOGUE: Fascinating. On a certain level it can be right or wrong. For example: I often talk to people in the theatre community... about a certain production I've reviewed. Usually it's a situation where I've given it a relatively good review. And there's a kind of clever coy look that they get on their faces as if they know something I don't know. And what they know is that, from the standpoint of the theatre professional, that was a bad production...and they all know it...and there is no question in their minds that they know it. They know it for very concrete criteria; they use definite and concrete criteria; it's not a question of interpretation. They know that the scene that I liked was, in fact, a last-minute compromise because the director just couldn't get the actress to deliver the goddam line the way he wanted her to, and so he settled for having to do it that way. They know that what I thought was particularly brilliant bit of staging was introduced at the last minute because the goddam fly broke so they had to rush a flat in...so they laugh when the critic is taken in by that sort of thing. So, in a sense, there is right and wrong. If something has just been done wrong and yet still manages to impress the critic and the audience, the theatre people, as I suppose any con artist would, say, "Phew! Got away with that one."

Now, on a more intangible level, there is a question of excellence and badness in the theatre. On the level that I am talking about now, criteria of taste and historical moment are dominant. I came out of an academic background in which I was taught that there are absolutes. Shakespeare will always be a great playwright. Molière will always be a great playwright. Since working in the theatre, I've encountered a much more relativistic world. Paul Thompson of Theatre Passe Muraille once said to me: "No, Molière was great when he wrote," and, then, which apparently is historically true, for almost one hundred years he wasn't produced. Because for whatever reason, because of popular tastes and attitudes during that century Molière wasn't interesting. And Paul said: "During that hundred years he wasn't great and then he got great again. And then, for a while, he wasn't great and now he's great again because everybody's producing him again. He's speaking to people." The criterion of greatness is: At this moment are you getting through to the audience or aren't you? Now obviously a lot of playwrights never come back. The plays are lost, they are just bad, they're irrelevant, they're opaque, they're whatever, they're too mannered, too narrowly identified with their own time. There you can say without hesitation: That writer was not great. But what about this on again off again? What do you do with that? I suppose you have to conclude that any writer that keeps coming back like a slugged puncher is a great fighter. No matter how often he has been knocked down he gets up again, and that's as close as you can come to an absolute, and it's not the academics who rule on what makes a great writer.

MacF: *I assume that the quote, "All work is not of equal value." is one with which you agree. What is it that qualifies you to decide which of the productions you see is more valuable than another? What do you discern that I might not? Why is your opinion valid?*

CONLOGUE: Well, take a play like The Elephant Man, a very powerfully written play. Even a bad production of it is going to impress an audience which has not seen a good production. So my job quite simply, having seen a good production of that play, is to say, "Hey, you know, this could have been a lot better. I know you (loved) it -- but boy! If you'd really seen it, it would have hit you three times harder, and by the way, even though you liked it, you probably didn't get the value from this scene, which has quite a beautiful passage in it. The actor mumbled and you missed something there, and over here you might have missed this. I hope that by doing that..." Well, your question is: What gives me the right? (What gives me the right) is that I've seen more and that I know how it could have been done better. That's simply that.

MacF: *The next question (it might occur more strongly to me, living in London, Ontario) is whether you apply different standards to different kinds of production: That is, regional, amateur, Stratford, Broadway, classical, vernacular and so forth? If so, how is this justified?*

CONLOGUE: It's part of what I try not to do. The earlier generation of critics in Toronto were polarized around Nathan Cohen who believed that all things should be judged by the same criterion -- and he, therefore, panned almost everything he saw, because you had a youthful theatre community which lacked experience being judged by the same criteria as New York. Or one did what Herb Whittaker did, which was to attempt to be relativistic about it. I am very torn about that issue: I don't know which of the two critics was right in his time, but I do know that now it is not right to be relativistic any more. Our people have had enough time and enough experience, and to continue to erect tariff barriers...is to encourage mediocrity. I really believe that people don't reach for the best in themselves unless they have been scared to death by knowing they are going to be stood up against the best. Granted, toughness of character isn't necessarily concommitant to artistic talent. It may well be that there are artistically talented people who will never be realized, because the trauma of that kind of judgment will knock them out of the ring, and I've seen that happen. It's a loss, but it's an unavoidable loss, and the residue are the people who are both talented and tough, and they're the ones you have to go with.

MacF: *It seems to me that this may rule out some of the plays at a place like the Blyth Festival near my home, for instance. They may not aspire to be other than regional plays; they may not be aiming for Broadway or whatever, but they have their own excellence. It seemed to me that you had this in mind when you covered Blyth not so long ago.*

CONLOGUE: Well, again, I'm not sure what a regional play is.

MacF: *No. I don't know for sure either.*

CONLOGUE: I think that theatre by its nature is parochial...Because of the cost, because of the electronic distribution (television and film) aren't parochial, are forms that tend therefore to be general in their thoughts and presentation. But theatre is a parochial art. It always starts off speaking to the audience that the playwright knows and playwrights who try to speak to a larger audience usually fail. Most writers who succeed on Broadway, when you talk to them (I will generalize here and say this has always been true), are writers who did not start off trying to hit Broadway. They are writers who started off trying to speak with a certain conviction and a certain amount of passion to their audience. They had something they were trying to get off their chests. They weren't writing because they wanted to make a million bucks. So, in that sense, a play presented to the rural audience at Blyth and a first-time play presented to an audience in Chicago are exactly the same. The writer, hopefully, is aware of his audience and is trying to speak to it as truthfully as he can. So, in that sense, as far as the quality of script is concerned, I would try to apply the same standard in both cases. And what you are referring to is probably instances in which I failed to do that. I know that I failed to do that on more than one occasion. I regret a couple of those Blyth reviews, because in retrospect I know that I over-praised the productions and I shouldn't have done that. Blyth is actually a remarkably successful phenomenon in that it has managed to become a successful popular theatre in a non-urban setting and that's very rare. Of course, you just discount the straw hat circuits and the red barn theatre and so on, which are pandering operations. But Blyth is a good quality theatre operation. I guess what I am saying,is given that I tended to over-praise it... giving overly positive reviews to productions that didn't really deserve it, (Blyth is) quite an achievement. The best theatre has always grown out of circumstances like that. Peter Brook was very accurate in his book The Empty Space when he said that what started off as a Dyonisian revel has now turned into the gala evening. Mind you,there is an inherent falseness about a lot of the big-city theatre presentation. Well if you will just look at, for example, the American theatre, many of the best young American playwrights have never had a Broadway success and maybe they never will. It's a completely different thing: a generation ago you expected Tennesse Williams and Arthur Miller and Edward Albee to succeed on Broadway because Broadway at that point was still a reasonably functioning theatrical venue. Now it's become something different. It has calcified to a point where almost nothing but musicals or what I think of as extremely shocking straight plays, such as -- well look at the straight plays that have succeeded on Broadway the last few years: The Elephant Man, Whose Life Is It Anyway? A lot of disfigurement and deformity make very good plays about disfigurement and deformity -- but still,it's a speciality. You don't want to demand that your writers only write that kind of play -- or family dramas...You have a theatre scene which is a market calcified to a point where only certain kinds of plays can succeed. In smaller markets, with productions of smaller budgets, you don't have to have 100,000 people seeing it every week, but -- well not 100,000 every week but grossing $100,000 every week. You can write more intelligently. That's all there is to it, and you can respond. It's like precision instruments and gross instruments. You can do much more interesting things with a little sports car than with a Mack truck. Broadway is a Mack truck now.

MacF: *Brahms or somebody said: "Music is kept alive on the cottage piano of the amateur." The regionals aren't, in that sense, "amateur," of course, but there's a similarity between that and what you're saying.*

CONLOGUE: (This is) one of the things that came through to me very much in this last three weeks of travelling around the country. I came back as exhilarated by this trip as by any trip I've made to New York, because I saw, for example, in places like Saskatoon, people who are really excited by the theatre. Really excited! They are as intelligent or talented as people in New York and are much more likely to actually do some good work. And they do good work. The impulse seems to be less confused in smaller places. I went out to drink with a couple of the administrators in one of the theatres of Saskatoon and they dragged a guy along with them who I thought was just some hanger-on or other. We were sitting around joking and horsing around and having a few beers -- and I found out afterwards that he was the president of the board of the theatre. He is, as presidents of theatre boards have to be, quite a wealthy local businessman. I thought: In Toronto, that man's equivalent would see the administrators of that theatre only in his front room in Forest Hill, and they would sit and sip tea or sherry. That's a completely different kind of encounter, for different reasons, different values. That guy in Saskatoon loved theatre and he was excited. His counterpart in Toronto, at the risk of generalizing, is probably far too likely to be on that theatre board because somebody's told him that in terms of his corporate climb this is the next best thing to do. I would definitely say that is true of the Stratford board which I find to be detestable. I'm not irrational on this subject. I recognize a good board member when I meet one, but you meet them in small cities, not big ones.

MacF: *Back to criticism itself, and the validity of it. We dealt with whether there was a "sound" view of a production...*

CONLOGUE: Yes I think on the mechanical level there is a sound view of a production, just to clarify that a bit. But in terms of the transmission of values, what is a great play for one generation will not be for another, but I think that's an inescapable thing.

Taste, that is, "the good" in theatre is not a platonic thing at all. What is good in theatre is determined by a certain number of human beings who have a combination of the following things: (a) Elegant articulation (good talker and therefore influential), or (b) They have a podium, like critics (I speak to 300,000 people every day. How many people get to do that? How many people get to be that influential?), or (c) They are just people who are unusually definite about their opinions and can enforce them regardless of whether they are right or wrong. Gina Mallet is a good example of that. I've watched her browbeat people... making sure that what is considered to be good theatre is what she thinks is good theatre. I think it is always true that what ultimately percolates to the top as an idea of what is now exciting theatre...is simply a question of the force of the various voices which happen to be around at that time. Would we think, for example, that Samuel Beckett was a good playwright, had not the best and most articulate voices of his generation enforced the idea that he was a good playwright? So on that level I'm not sure. It gets back to the thing about Molière being switched on and off.

MacF: *If there is no one "correct" critical judgment, is newspaper criticism simply impressionistic?*

CONLOGUE: Somebody who chooses to stay in newspaper criticism for a fair length of time will write better than that (impressionism) because he will have seen so much that a certain intellectual structure will emerge after a while. But most newspaper critics don't stay in the job that long. My two predecessors did two years apiece. I think that at the end of two years I was just beginning to understand my job. At the same time look at my situation. The curtain comes down at ten-thirty or eleven o'clock. I take ten or fifteen minutes to get back to the newspaper. I start writing by anywhere between a few minutes before eleven o'clock and ten after eleven. My deadline is eleven forty-five. So I'm writing a piece in an hour at the most, often a half an hour. Now, even George Bernard Shaw could not have written great theatre criticism under those circumstances. And I think we ought not to delude ourselves about that. It will be impressionistic in the sense that what you're writing about is your first impression of the play. Sometimes that's enough. Again, if the play happens to be one in a genre that you understand fairly well, you can write a formal kind of review. This farce is a bad farce for these reasons. The clues weren't dropped in the early scenes. The writer wasted dialogue. He did this, he did that. You can know those things immediately when the curtain comes down. And probably in the majority of cases you can write a reasonably decent review. But what do you do with the challenging play? It is very often true that I don't know what I think of a play until at least a day after I've seen it. I find myself on a significant number of occasions regretting my review. Sometimes, rare, still but it happens, I don't know for weeks. Eventually I know. It percolates to the surface almost in a subconscious fashion. You just wake up one morning and realize that you've forgotten most of what you saw in the play. You may have been very impressed with it when you walked out, but the truth of the matter emerges when things fade away and you realize the thing didn't have a focus. It had a lot of spectacle perhaps. It was a shocker, it was this, it was that, but it wasn't focused -- and the truth may take a while to emerge. In that sense you have done your reader a disservice because you had to write your first impression, and it was wrong.

MacF: *A minor question -- can a critic enjoy friendly relationships with people whose work he/she may be called upon to judge? Do you? How do you deal with this problem?*

CONLOGUE: No. I don't think that's possible. It's frustrating because it's natural to want to be friends with people with whom you have something in common and in that sense the critic's position vis-à-vis the theatre community is an unnatural one. But the human reality is that you can't help but be influenced. When you know that you have to answer to the people who you are writing about, as you obviously do if you know them socially, you pull your punches. I'd pull my punches and I think any critic who says he wouldn't is a liar. The best critics have no relationships whatsoever with the theatre community. They write nothing but reviews, they never do interviews. That's a sensible precaution. Unfortunately our situation isn't sophisticated enough that newspapersare willing to hire a critic just to criticize. I'm compelled also to do interviews, which I find difficult, but not impossible, because again you don't parlay an interview into a friendship. You talk to the person once, usually before a show, and you don't have to face them again. So the only problem there is that you may be influenced by having essentially been given a two-hour pep talk on the production. If you're anything less than a pathological personality, of course you're going to be influenced by an encounter with another person...If you like the person you are talking to, how can you help but be influenced? You are privy to information that the audience isn't and that's very bad for the critic. I'm also obliged to do news coverage which is even worse. That's a ghastly situation and I wish I could make my editors understand the problem. Again they cling to the fiction that I'm a reporter. They are wrong. Reporters don't go around writing commentary pieces on the material that they normally report on. Well they do, but not in the same sense that I do, and what do I do if a publicist phones me up and says: "Hey, I know who the big star in Stratford is going to be this summer." Well my editors want us to be first to have the name in print. On the other hand...that publicist...says please do an interview with my lead actor. I very likely won't be interested in doing that interview. The lead actor, odds are, isn't somebody whose recent work has dazzled me, that I've been dying to talk to. So if I say no, I have to worry about whether that publicist will phone me the next time he has a juicy tidbit. And it's very likely that he won't. Why should he? Nothing in it for him.

MacF: *It is confusing the role of a beat reporter -- who becomes part of the political, or police, or whatever establishment he's covering, and an editorialist who acts as a public arbiter of the same establishment. Like working both sides of the street.*

CONLOGUE: I find it insufferable and you know, theatre people who come out of the British tradition, for example, are appalled when I phone up and ask them for an interview -- and I think they are right. But we haven't come to the point where newspaper will pay to have two people covering that beat.

MacF: *It must be very close to it. The Globe has certainly in the last few years beefed up its establishment.*

CONLOGUE: One would think so. However, we still have eight writers covering arts beats and we have only two general assignment writers in our department. So I can't count on the help of either of those writers. You know even the one of them who fortunately is very interested in theatre and who is thought of in the theatre community as my second stringer, is not in reality my second stringer at all. She can be assigned to be doing something else the night that I need her...so we do suffer still from our youth, I think, as an institution.

MacF: *As a lifelong rationalizer, I'd say: "That's true, but we've come a hell of a long way in the past ten years."*

CONLOGUE: Absolutely! My editors will say right back to me, "Look -- we're supporting ten full-time arts writers and it's a large expense. We are sending you travelling, we're paying your cab chits and your long-distance phone calls and the department has a budget of over a million dollars a year." Again, I assume obviously we (arts writers) are paying those bills or we wouldn't be there, but it is an improvement and it reflects the size and scope of the arts scene in Toronto if the newspaper can afford to do that. Sadly, it's not true anywhere else in Canada, and it isn't likely to become true because in small cities -- I suppose this is as true in Leicester, England as it is in Saskatoon -- the local newspaper can only afford to have one person writing about the arts because, damn it, there isn't that much going on.

GINA MALLET

GINA MALLET

THE TORONTO STAR

Interviewed by telephone from the Star office

on

February 12 and April 14, 1982

MacF: *Do you believe that a daily newspaper theatre critic provides a service to readers? Is so, could you describe the service.*

MALLET: You're saying it happened. A critic's acting as a reporter, saying it's happened, where it happened, who's in it and by interpreting whats happening, I guess, you're also offering an opinion whether the reader should pay to see it. That's one. Two, you're offering an opinion, an educated opinion, against which playgoers, people who enjoy plays, can bounce their own opinions, and three, I guess the most crucial, is that you are alerting the public to something important that's happening in your city.

MacF: *Do you believe that theatrical criticism enjoys a high readership in your paper? Why?*

MALLET: The entertainment section in our paper is pretty well read I gather. It's one of the five most popular features of the Star. And I think because of Nathan Cohen, anyone who's a Star critic will have a very high profile, and probably therefore get a pretty good readership. And by nature just by being the biggest paper we get a big readership.

MacF: *How does your approach to theatrical criticism fit within your paper's editorial philosophy?*

MALLET: I don't think our editorial policy, frankly, is that clear-cut. You know, we certainly get no feeling about what we should be writing about, what I should be writing about or anything. But quite obviously we are a mass paper. We're not going to a select audience, we're going to a very wide audience. And I think that reflects on question 4 which is ...

MacF: *Does your critical/intellectual style conform to one or another orothodox category of criticism: sociological, formalistic, psychological, etc.? Or do you find that elements of several critical approaches are present in your work?*

MALLET: I really don't think of orthodox categories of criticism, I could use, I could write, in a daily paper. I'm writing for an enormous number of different kinds of people so obviously I think what you have to do is create your own style to suit the paper and to suit the time and to probably suit the work offered. Eclectic is probably how I would describe it. I think that one thing does get overlooked in all this, and that is that it is primarily a writing job. I think that if you aren't a good writer, you're not going to be able to come to grips with being a newspaper critic. I think you cannot bring a group of principles and try and apply them across the board. I think you have to just always be completely honest with yourself. That obviously means a person has a job where he has to be a writer and in that sense be educated, and have a really good grasp of where theatre comes out of and where it fits into.

Then I think you have to really, really go into yourself about it. Like all writing, I mean all art, you find it in yourself or you don't find it. I think the most boring criticism is the kind of criticism that pays no attention to what is actually happening on the stage. That's what bores me, anyway.

MacF: *Is there a convention concerning the role of the newspaper critic that is tacitly observed by both critic and reader? For instance, is the critic supposed to be giving useful guidance to the theatrical people, and the newspaper's readers observing the process over his/her shoulder? Is the critic supposed to be the audience's advocate in seeking entertainments of a certain standard? What do you see as the conventional, or mythical, relationship among critic, audience, theatre and reader? How does it relate to the reality of daily newspaper criticism?*

MALLET: Is there a convention? I don't really think so. Most people, I suspect, read a piece of criticism as a piece of writing — unless they are in the theatre where of course they read it avidly.

MacF: *It's bread and butter then.*

MALLET: Yes, put it through a magnifying glass. Memorize it for lifetime. But most people, I think, read it to get an idea of really just what's going on, and to be amused, to be entertained, to be informed.

Is the critic ... this is a knotty problem. The critic is obviously the audience's advocate. That's one of the most valuable things a critic has to offer in that a critic's got to notice what's ghastly about a show in terms of standards.

If the people can't get on the stage, you've got to say that. If the lighting doesn't work and if people can't remember their lines -- all those things are very basic reportage. You can say it doesn't matter, you can say there are extenuating circumstances, but you've got to notice that for the audience's sake. If you really are interested in encouraging people to go to the theatre, and encouraging, I believe, is a good thing to do, you can't say: "Well, you don't understand -- they can't act yet." You've got to say people have to have standards.

" ...critics are supposed to give useful guidance to theatrical people." I think there lies death. The lesson theatrical people learn from newspapers, I hope, is simply that you can't be a special pleader. If you're going to pay twenty bucks and you're going to go out for the evening and you're going to spend two hours in a small space, you deserve to have someone's best efforts put at your disposal, and I think that's a reality that they've got to take.

On the other hand, I think that a perceptive critic will obviously salt that information with as many insights as they can offer that will show exactly what they mean. I think one's duty is to be clear-cut you know. I don't think there is a relationship other than that. The only relationship is that we're read. We're like actors. If people don't come to see you, you're dead.

MacF: *How do you approach a production? What are you looking for? How did you arrive at these criteria?*

MALLET: Well, I should say I try to go open-minded as far as I can do so. I'm willing to watch whatever goes on -- maybe not for all the time I'm there. I think a play or production has to have an irresistible something that holds the attention way past the first stimuli to something that gives you a chance to apply intellectual analysis. If you can't get to that point I think you are in a bit of trouble.

I always look for the establishment of an atmosphere that gives the audience a context of what they are going to see. And then what you hope and pray for is that the production will be well enough done so that the ideas that exist in the play, if there are ideas in the play, will be able to come through.

There are also obviously the basic criteria, and that is, what is it they are doing? Why are they doing it? And are they doing it well? These are the three basic questions that you do constantly get back to. I think now after being a critic for six years, the hardest thing to see on stage is a human being. And I think that now that is what I look for.

When I talk about standards, I don't expect everyone to be able to go out and afford terribly expensive sets, but one expects a play to be done in a way that fulfills it, and that can mean just simply with a chair, but done with such intensity and purpose you really know exactly what's happening.

MacF: *When you write a critical piece what do you intend it to do? Is the piece supposed to function at more than one level? What purpose(s) does it serve?*

MALLET: Well I guess provoke, spur, create interest, controversy; make people think, make people want to go in some cases; make people aware of why the play isn't working in other cases. One hopes that it does function at several levels. It functions as a report, and as a something that makes people think a bit harder. Many times one sees a play or production in which ... whether theatre can continue to exist must come up. You've got to question all these things. So I think that in a good piece, you're really writing well and on top of it, you're always writing to that point; you're always saying what it is for the theatre to be alive. I don't think that's too heavy. One may not succeed in doing it. But I think you've got to try and write that.

MacF: *Do you write for a particular audience, or simultaneously for different groups in the community served by your newspaper? How do you conceive of your audience(s)?*

MALLET: No I really don't write for a particular audience and as I say I try and avoid the theatre audience as my specific audience. I really write to try and reach as many people as possible. Matthew Arnold, made a point that the greatest function was to get as many people in on something as possible, to spread culture around, to say: "Look, this does have relevance to you. This does mean something to your lives ... It's ... interesting and entertaining to you." Otherwise we're not going to have people. I don't believe in ivory towers I guess.

MacF: *How would you describe your philosophy of journalism? Do you subscribe to a particular ethics of criticism within the philosophy?*

MALLET: Eh, eh! I've seen Absence of Malice. I don't know if I have a philosophy. I think ethics. Reporting, I assume, has ethics. You've got to be accurate, you've got to analyze your own biases -- and the same applies in the theatre: determination not to let one's ego intrude. I believe that both sides of the story should be reported. In criticism, I just don't think you do report both sides of the story. I think that you're presenting an opinion -- based on your own knowledge and convictions and whether you're a good enough writer to get that across.

MacF: *As a major critic, how do you see your responsibilities (a) to your paper (b) to its readers (c) to a production's management and investors (d) to the professional playwrights, actors and other creative personnel connected with the production?*

MALLET: To the paper, basically to produce readable copy and to make sure, in what you are reporting, that you are doing a job for them really. It is a purely professional function. For the readers, well, I think you've really got to fullfil certain reader expectations. When one is writing for the popular press you, therefore, have to see it as partly a consumer job. You are saying whether something is good or bad in terms that they can understand, so they can make a decision about going to see it. I think what you try and do is, over a period of time, extend their awareness of the theatre as a place that is not merely a place to go to say right or wrong, but a place that can offer you, one hopes, an ever larger variety of experience. I think, like Diaghilev, your really prime job is never to bore. The management ... I don't think we owe anything to the management of the theatres — I don't think we should have anything to do with them. I think we should stay at arm's length as much as possible. The professionals ... well, again, this is a very tough one. Our first and foremost job is to write for the readers. I think, though, the real problem with this one, certainly in Canada at the moment and in Toronto in particular, is that everything a critic writes is graven in stone for the profession. They take what you say unbelievably hard and they are so hungry for reaction that they want the critics basically to do a job which we can't do for them, which is go through a production with a fine-tooth comb. I am amazed at some of the things people call me up and say. "Didn't you notice that?" Or: "Why didn't you notice that?" Or: "Why didn't you discuss that?" Or: "Why didn't you write more about that?" There is this tremendous hunger for reaction, which I am afraid comes out of the fact that we don't yet have a really well informed audience. They are obviously not getting feedback enough.

MacF: *They want you to fill a vacuum.*

MALLET: Yes. They want to be told a number of things which, if we had a sturdier profession, a more self-aware profession in some ways, they would be able perhaps to get from their fellows. Once you get a real professional community, you will hear actors describe a scene in the play as very important, that to the general public wasn't very important, and shouldn't necessarily be very important for the general public. The growth of a profession is not necessarily the growth of an art, if you understand. I can use an example here. I was talking yesterday to John Wood who directed Journey's End earlier this year at MAC, and he said he was very offended with me. He said, "How could you say the end of Journey's End has a homosexual feeling about it?" I said, "Because I've read all the books about the men who fought the first World War and I know a lot about that generation and the society from which they came, and the custom of older men adopting younger men. Even if it wasn't explicitly homosexual, it is certainly an example of homophilia" ... "Well, he said, "I went through all of R.C. Sherriff (the author) and I couldn't find any of that." Do you see what I mean? He is looking at it the wrong way from my point of view. But, you know, this is a timely discussion, one which I would hope would happen within the profession. Although he is right in a literal sense, the fact is that for the public, the interesting thing is that from that play you get a whole era. You don't just get the play itself.

MacF: *I think that it is the difference between an anatomist's interest in the form and what can be seen from the outside. They are two legitimate interests.*

MALLET: Well, this is the problem. I think the profession at the moment is starved for informed feedback and tends to want the popular press to do it for them when I don't think we can.

MacF: *Does your power at the box office concern you? Does it influence what you say or how you say it?*

MALLET: No, I really think a critic can't waste one's time on that. The moment you do, you are compromised. Unfortunately, I suspect that if you are half-way good as a critic and do get a readership, you have a power which is out of proportion; I don't really know what you can do about that. The whole tradition of criticism is that there are lots of critics. We are now in a very bad era for criticism. This is one of the tragedies of the Canadian theatre. The Canadian theatre is growing up at a time of democratization of art, which tends to say criticism is unfair and elitist. Yet you are never going to really have people sweating their guts out unless they have some unfair and uneasy standards to try and reach. So we are caught in this box. We haven't really established in this country, because I guess we don't have that tradition really, that the greatest things in life are things you suffer for. Of course, the democratization of art doesn't believe that. It believes that if you spit on the sidewalk that's just as important as Michelangelo sculpting David. So we've got a real problem of perception and definition at the moment here.

MacF: *Do your responsibilities as a critic include encouraging the growth and viability of professional theatre (a) in Canada, (b) in Toronto? If so, how do you carry out this responsibility?*

MALLET: One hopes that by being there witnessing, you are in effect encouraging. I think active encouragement in the terms of: "I really think these people deserve to exist although I hate them," is missing the point. You have to believe that what you are seeing is worthwhile and will go on. We are past the stage where just by existing, a theatre must be praised.

I think at the very beginning, that probably was important, like an amateur group in a small town. They are offering something no one else offers. A theatre comes along and puts on a play no one else has dared to put on. Whether that production is good or bad is immaterial. The fact that they've put on the play is obviously of far greater importance.

But now I think our priorities are different. I think that the way a critic today, at this particular time in Canada, can encourage the development of professional theatre, is by making absolutely clear what his or her standards and beliefs are about theatre, and by making sure every time you write, that those priorities are clear. This is the only way you can encourage it. By being absolutely clear in explaining what you do and don't like. Those are the only things. We are, at the moment in Canadian theatre history, where we have got to start saying what things we do believe are worthwhile and what aren't. But that is how we encourage.

MacF: *The time for affirmative action is past?*

MALLET: Yes, it is established now. We have got many, too many, theatres in some ways for the profession we now have, so let's start making decisions about what kind of theatres we think are going to grow. That I think at the moment is the critic's responsibility.

MacF: *Critics obviously need theatre. Sometimes the reverse is not felt to be true. Would you give me your view of the mutual needs of theatre for critic and vice versa?*

MALLET: Do critics need art? Sure. I don't think you can have critics without something to criticize. The real growth in this country of theatre really has at this point less to do with the critics than with the ability to make it a living art for audiences. But, of course, I believe absolutely that a theatre that's any good needs critics. I don't see how a really good theatre here will grow without informed criticism, and often sharp criticism -- and I think all criticism is positive when it is clear cut, to be perfectly blunt. What we need at this point, particularly in Canadian theatre, is people able to discuss things on a scale ... Maybe our theatre hasn't reached that scale yet. But we have got to see what we are aiming for, what a classical theatre really means, what a regional theatre really means. I think that at this moment, yes, we certainly need critics. And there is a whole other part of it. Criticism should be part of the literary life of a country. Reading criticism should be fun for lots of people who don't go to the theatre. That's it. I really think that the role of the critic in the development of theatre in an activist sense, is out of the question. If we lose our detachment and write from the vantage point of the people putting on the stuff, we are doing them no service and we are simply confusing the audience totally.

MacF: *Are all critics failed future or resting playwrights or performers? Or does criticism in popular newspapers have creative validity of its own?*

MALLET: A critic is a reactor, someone who likes to react and analyze a reaction. I don't think playwrights or performers like to do that, are necessarily reflective in that way, and I think, therefore, that it's a different instinct. I happen to think that Shaw's music criticism was much better than his drama criticism because (in it) he had no ambition; he wasn't out proselytizing rather than reflecting and reacting. I think criticism in popular newspapers just depends on how good the writer is, honestly. It has no validity at all if you can't write a line.

MacF: *Can criticism of a production be "right" or "wrong"?*

MALLET: I'm not sure. Right or wrong sort of carries a moral connotation. But I can say that certainly there is good and bad criticism. Good criticism I think, is insightful, has perceptions and tries, at least, to deal with some ideas and also correctly calls a play or production in terms of interpretation. I think someone who goes to Hamlet and says this should be played by a black man, that's a bad critic. Anything like that, you've got to know what you are writing about. If you can't get the plot right for instance, or if you've misunderstood the central character, then it's obviously a bad piece of criticism.

MacF: *"All work is not of equal value." This appears to be a central assumption of criticism (although possibly not quite such a truism as it appears). In any case, what is it that qualifies you to decide which of the productions you see is more valuable than another? What do you discern that I might not? Why is your opinion valid?*

MALLET: All work is not of equal value. Absolutely. Of course -- all work is not of equal value! That's a political idea. A socialist idea which is absolute madness as far as I'm concerned. What is it that qualifies me to decide? Well the only possible reason that qualifies me is that I've now spent six years comparing and looking at productions, and many years before that going to a theatre a great deal and analyzing and writing about it so that it's simply the body of knowledge I've accumulated. That's my only qualification. My opinion -- whether it's valid or not -- depends entirely on whether or not the readers are really convinced by it. Or whether it goes beyond, whether it means something more than, just the statement of something being good or bad. I think you are having an effect if someone says; "Well, I never looked at it that way before," and that they are interested enough to consider it seriously.

MacF: *Do you apply different standards to different kinds of production: regional, amateur, Stratford, Broadway, classical, vernacular and so forth? If so, how is this justified.*

MALLET: No. One tries not to. I don't go to amateur theatre so I apply the same standard across the board.

MacF: *If you were a local critic, how would you cope with the problem of amateur stage?*

MALLET: Well I think that's a good point. What I think one would have to do would be to simply demand that you are not given much space (for the purpose), and to find out what they want. I don't think amateur stuff should be covered except in reportage. It should just be that so-and-so was there, but there shouldn't be any attempt to try and apply professional standards at all in that case, because obviously they are not serious people. Their lives don't depend on it. It can be delightful, believe you me. But I think one line does it. Take it lightly.

MacF: *It always seems to me that critics are tentative in their assertions about the role of the craft, but often quite didactic in their observations during their exercise of it. This seems inconsistent to me. Does newspaper criticism tend to imply that it is something which it actually is not: authoritative, certain of clear-cut standards, possessed of unquestioned access to the truth? If so, why?*

MALLET: Tentative, that's rather an interesting point. I think critics don't always see themselves as other people see them. I think the very act of offering criticism makes one seem terribly authoritative - which of course one isn't necessarily. And also I think that the fact that it comes out the day after the show, and it has usually got space limitations of some kind, and you're writing very fast... means it's much sharper. It should be. I think good newspaper criticism is very sharp for this reason, because you're having to pare it all down to essentials. I think that makes the critics sound much more definite than they usually are. I don't think critics want to be cast in the role of the heavy, but if you do have fun with a production, if you come back to the office and say ha ha ha, I'll do this as a parody -- then you really do get the theatre community on your neck. They can't have it both ways, you know. If you decide you are not going to mention anyone's names, this is too dreadful, but I'll just do a parody of it, then they all get hysterical. So there is absolutely no way you can win but I don't think what critics write is written in stone. It really is how they are perceived more than what they themselves intend.

MacF: *Assuming that your judgment is valid, is a judgment that disagrees with it invalid.*

MALLET: Yes. I assume my judgment's valid. I have trouble with the word "valid". It's just that, sure, I would say I would usually stand up for my judgment against someone else's.

MacF: *In other words, is there an authentically sound view of a production? If so, how is it determined? (By unanimity, for instance?)*

MALLET: I don't know if there is an authentically sound view. But I think the critic who offers the most interesting perceptions, and thus clearly illuminates a play -- I think maybe that is what you should mean by that -- illuminates the play in a way that makes people think about it. There's a tremendous problem about this. I think it really is a quality of mind we're talking about. You either have it or you don't. Obviously the reviews become authoritative in people's minds -- for whatever reason.

MacF: *If there is no one "correct" critical judgment, then is (daily newspaper) criticism simply impressionistic?*

MALLET: Yes, criticism is impressionistic but I don't think that means that the perceptions it can contain are not right on target. Or that the opinion expressed isn't the one that's going to be the best one for putting the play in perspective. Again, immediacy is often very helpful in that regard.

MacF: *Can a critical statement be said to be true? If so, is one that disagrees with it false?*

MALLET: Can a critical statement be said to be true? Hey! Well it's only true to the writer, isn't it? I think if you write and what you're writing comes out of *your* thoughts, and that you've put it through your mind that's one thing. Untrue criticism to me would be things that are just lifted from other people or copies ... I really think that when you are looking at anything, you have to say what does it mean to me personally? To begin with, then go from there and slowly build it up. Because it's you who's the tool. And if you are not using yourself, whatever you write is pretty dull.

MacF: *Can newspaper criticism itself be subjected to criticism? What are the criteria you would use if doing so?*

MALLET: Can newspaper criticism itself be subjected to criticism? Yes of course. Well it's written too fast and too soon and grammar is often slipping and words can be misspelled even misused. I think the main criticism of daily reviewers is that they too easily become lazy and cowardly. Unfortunately, I think newspaper editors themselves, certainly managing editors, aren't really very interested in reviews. They want reviewers to be well respected. Preferably liked. I think anyone new to a beat is going to suffer terribly from the temptation to play politics and to steer a middle course, and to be bland and comforting -- or just plain gauche -- rather than have some beliefs, because that's the way that gets everyone off your back. So I think that's really the biggest curse of newspaper criticism. It's a very uncertain life, and I think people react that way.

MacF: *If you were reviewing your own columns in collected form, what would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of them?*

MALLET: I would say rather erratic. I'm pretty irreverent, pretty impatient with mediocrity. I think I do have a belief that theatre has to be great or it shouldn't exist at all. I do have the desire to see human values in the theatre rather than trendy abstractions. I think I do appreciate acting, and I think I'm quite skillful at describing its impact and describing exactly what's happening on stage. I think if I'm on target I have sometimes managed to link together my beliefs that you really don't have theatre in the abstract, that its got to be part of the whole of our culture, the whole of, if you want, Western civilization, that you can't just take it out and say that it can go in 100 different ways at once.

MacF: *So that is an essential view of theatre.*

MALLET: Yes. I think that I have a complete conviction, and I think I've often said that the greatest drama is the most acceptable of all. In other words, it has to reach the people where they are. I have a definite preference, however, for complicated psychological situations in closed societies and I do not like the struggle of the inarticulate. I abhor that. I like people struggling against enormous odds who have at least intellect on their side.

MacF: *What would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of the critical work published in the Globe and Mail?*

MALLET: The Globe and Mail. I have to say...well, honestly, the nicest thing I can say is: appalling. I just don't think that the person on the job has any experience of life or the theatre. He writes politically, which I find is terrible -- no real feeling for acting, and he never gets the plot right. He really doesn't analyze what's happened accurately. So I think that's the problem.

MacF: *Do you write for your newspaper differently than you would if your writing were directed to a person you knew to share your own intellectual and cultural level and tastes? Why? How?*

MALLET: Well I suppose so but I'm a journalist so I'm obviously very conscious about having to reach people. But I try not to be a complete hack in that sense. I believe in it. I believe that one has to try to reach as many people as possible. I'm very idealistic. I believe that if you write well enough you will interest people in things they haven't thought about and don't know much about. I try to use the medium of wit; I try and entertain people or intrigue them, because I feel that is one way to get people involved in subjects that they wouldn't otherwise pay attention to. Today we live in an ironic society and maybe that's the only way you can do it. Sincerity and earnestness -- that's not my style.

MacF: *Should a critic be concerned about the results of her/his writing?*

MALLET: Yes and no. I mean you really want to just have people reading it. What can I say?

MacF: *Well, you have answered that.*
Can a critic enjoy friendly relationships with people whose work he/she may be called upon to judge? Do you? How do you deal with this problem?

MALLET: Yes you can enjoy friendly relationships with people who are sophisticated and cool and ambitious and discreet. They can be counted on one hand. No, I meet people professionally a lot but I try never to go to parties and I just never meet anyone socially. You are dealing with people's egos and if they feel threatened by you, you might as well give up. They feel threatened by you anyway and so why should you lean on them by saying I like you personally? That's putting on an unbearable strain.

MacF: *What is the principal satisfaction in your line of work? Is there something you would rather do for a living?*

MALLET: It's always a challenge.

MacF: *Speaking generally, what are the objectives of daily newspaper theatre criticism? Do you feel that they are being met by Canadian newspapers?*

MALLET: I'm not sure daily newspaper criticism has a real objective except to have been the daily witness but, individually, I think the person who holds that job must have an objective. They must have an objective, as I say, to build a body of work of consistency where you can be referred to and where people can understand what you are getting at and perhaps set up standards. Ideally what one is trying to do is set up a consistent idea of what standards, and what great acting, and what great writing, are in the theatre, and what a great theatrical experience is -- so that's my objective. So that when I write and say something was wonderful, that even if people say: "I was bored by it, I didn't understand it" -- at least they will know what I've tried to say, and they won't say that it was just completely off at a tangent.

Again I go back to the business of writing. I mean that's it. The objective is that you've got to be a good writer and you've got to keep doing that. In daily Canadian newspapers, well my impression is that most daily reviewers in Canadian papers simply are not given any editorial support or guidance at all. They are not told that the most important thing is to be true to *them*. They are not told that the most important thing is to get all the knowledge you can and put it through themselves. They are told, as I say, to juggle a lot of political and community interests. I think people are really struggling against that now. I must say, I really admire people but I think they're running scared, critics. People aren't backing them up. They get attacked by the academic critics-- "Oh well daily criticism doesn't mean anything," and they take that terribly hard. And instead of saying "Well no one ever reads academic criticism, why don't you go boil your head?"...I think serious people take it hard. They want to do a good job. They want to take it hard. Then they can't take it hard because they are dealing in a different medium. They are dealing in a medium where they must be read to exist. So I think they are stuck with that. Then I think too much politics exists anyway in this country *vis-à-vis* the theatre, and *vis-à-vis* probably all the arts. You know: Is it advisable to say this is good or bad? I have read more bad reviews about new Canadian plays because clearly the critics feel that unless they are encouraging and unless they are positive about a Canadian play, they somehow are being treacherous. Well, this isn't true. We shouldn't be dealing with building a quote "Canadian Theatre". We should be much more concerned with being true to people who are true artists and there are only going to be a half a dozen in the world. And everything else is going to happen because the public likes it. It's going to be like TV. I think both principles are not expounded. I think it would be grand to have really good seminars for critical writing in Canada. I really do -- where people could talk and sit down and start being true to themselves. I think the biggest thing, on and off stage, is people being unable to say who they are and be willing to stand up for it.

MacF: *You're obviously pointing out that criticism in a daily newspaper has its own artistic merit and it should be seen that way by more people.*

MALLET: A good writer should get to people. Its good writing, its being able to make words work, and unless you are going to do that ... Again, as you know, on most newspapers there is very little feeling that this is what matters. And it is, in fact, ultimately what matters, because that is how we convey the most information and the most emotions.

We go back to the other problem which is that people are terrified of acknowledging the fact that human beings first react to things emotionally. They don't want to acknowledge that. So there is a tremendous tendency for people to jump immediately into some kind of computer jargon and pretend it's effective -- instead of linking together the fact that unless you are emotionally aroused,you're never going to think.

Which is why argument is still the best way of making people learn isn't it? Unless you are emotionally aroused you aren't going to think. We don't just have that stated clearly enough. We are very scared about emotions.

MacF: *I'm persuaded in the other direction of course. I think back to Walter Kerr again. I think he said: First, the emotions are the thing.*

MALLET: Well they've got to be. You start with it. You don't end with it. Unless one's stirred emotionally, I feel, for something on the stage, I'm not going to sit there. I'm going to start thinking about something that does stir me emotionally. That's why I'm a human. I'm not a computer. Unless you get me engaged I'm just going to spit you out of my mouth. What is the biblical saying? Blow hot and cold ... I'll spit you out of my mouth. And I really feel that. Now beyond that, of course, there are hundreds of variables, I mean there are hundreds of things that happen once your intellect becomes aroused. Then a whole bunch of different things happen.

MacF: *What popular newspaper critic past or present do you most admire? Why?*

MALLET: Kenneth Tynan, obviously. Because he was a terrific writer and he was idealistic and compassionate and a rebel and had all the right set of feelings. At the time he wrote, he was perfect for his time.

MacF: *What person or body of work has had the strongest influence on your work?*

MALLET: I should say equally Henry James and Evelyn Waugh.

MacF: *Have you any general comments on the social validity of theatrical criticism in popular daily newspapers.*

MALLET: Sure. I think theatrical criticism helps to make a society more interesting.

JAMES NELSON

JAMES NELSON

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Interviewed by Telephone from The (CP) Ottawa Bureau

on

April 14, 1982

MacF: *Do you believe that a daily newspaper theatre critic provides a service to readers? If so, could you describe the service.*

NELSON: Yes, I think it is primarily a service. I look upon it as a service to a certain degree to audiences who may not see the show at all. I am writing for a national network and even my Stratford stuff, which is the most important of the year, goes primarily to readers who won't get to Stratford this year or may never have been -- out west, and so on. Also to set or establish standards, but that is very difficult to describe in words.

MacF: *Do you believe that theatrical criticism enjoys a high readership in the papers served by CP?*

NELSON: That I don't know, because I don't have an accurate check on what papers use my copy and whether it is read or not. The difficulty is to get through the editors to the readers.

MacF: *Is that one of your big tasks as a national person -- conditioning editors?*

NELSON: Very much so. When I started this beat which has now been six or seven years I guess, and we had never had anyone covering this sort of thing, there were papers who totally ignored the field. Some carried no entertainment copy at all. So many of the papers including the Ottawa Journal, in those days, carried pages of entertainment ads, bingo ads, and theatre and motion picture ads, pages that were nine-tenths advertising with a strip of Broadway or Hollywood copy along the top. I started and my main purpose was to simply pour out Canadian copy and try to displace that. Still, I have problems with smaller papers in that they don't have room, I suppose.

MacF: *I don't know. I used to hear this even when I worked with a paper that was big. They would say, "we don't have room"; it is kind of stupid.*

NELSON: It is. I think many editors must look upon this as secondary and tertiary copy that goes out first.

MacF: *And I used to think that this was one of the ways in which news people seriously misread their audiences. Do you think that this is true?*

NELSON: Perhaps. I have talked to press officers and others in the arts organizations. They look upon all editors as police reporters and court reporters. The other thing is that in the smaller papers it is only by accident if they have anybody with sufficient knowledge in the field to feel they can make a decision. I have covered the Guelph Spring Festival. I don't know if I should name papers specifically or not. In the case of the Guelph Spring Festival, The Guelph Mercury, when it heard

I was coming, were greatly relieved that they wouldn't have to cover it. That is a significant artistic event...now that's the way it happened.

MacF: *How does your approach to theatrical criticism fit within the (CP) editorial philosophy?*

NELSON: Now that is a difficult one, because of our down-the-middle-of-the road, no-opinion style. When I first did it, I tried to do it in that fashion and not pass judgments, but there were cases when it had to be done. There were shows that were so abysmally bad you had to. I could do it, and I still do it often, by reporting audience reaction. You feel the audience reaction around you. You know when the audience is getting restless. The other way is that since Canadian Press is trying to be brighter, we do admit opinion if it is clearly shown as being the writer's opinion; and of course, within the general parameters of good taste and the other more legal parameters too.

MacF: *Does your critical/intellectual style conform to one or another orthodox category of criticism: sociological, formalistic, phychological, etc.? Or do you find that elements of several critical approaches are present in your work?*

NELSON: This question leaves me completely at sea, because I never think about these terms or approach my work in those terms.

MacF: *Is there a convention concerning the role of the newspaper critic that is tacitly observed by both critic and reader? For instance, is the critic supposed to be giving useful guidance to the theatrical people, and the newspaper's readers observing the process over his/her shoulder? Is the critic supposed to be the audience's advocate in seeking entertainments of a certain standard? What do you see as the conventional, or mythical, relationship among critic, audience, theatre and reader? How does it relate to the reality of daily newspaper criticism?*

NELSON: Like many critics, I am not sure that I call myself a critic. Basically, I am a reviewer and if you think of the subtle distinction between reviewer and critic...that's the line I try to draw. I figure I am there as representative of the audience, just not the audience present, but the audience that won't be there. I think it is important in covering the field that at least people have an opportunity to know what's going on in other parts of the country or in other theatres. I think that people in Toronto, who are swamped by the amount of activity in Toronto, should know that there is theatre elsewhere in the country. One of my criticisms of the Toronto papers is that they carry so little. Ray does get across the country occasionally, but generally, they carry so little -- and it's so odd that you see their reports from other parts of the country in terms of Toronto. I remember one case a few years ago in which the Hamilton Philharmonic played a concert in Toronto and the review actually stated that, having now played in Toronto, the Hamilton Philharmonic had to be judged in a world class. The curious thing is that I get a lot of coverage, a lot of play, in the western papers. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, I get good space on what is going on mainly here in Ottawa and the East. I don't get across the country as much because we have bureaus there. Halifax is good too. I am not as well read in the other Maritime papers.

MacF: *Obviously, you must take some satisfaction in having had a personal impact on the amount of coverage given cultural matters across the country.*

NELSON: I do, I guess. I hadn't thought of it. But yes, I do.

MacF: *How do you approach a production? What are you looking for? How did you arrive at these criteria?*

NELSON: Excellence. Feeling comfortable. If I am on edge or something.... Questionable taste. Whether you are enjoying this. On the other hand, I do look for things that are sort of thought-provoking. I think that sometimes you can be made uncomfortable for a good purpose, but if it is being made uncomfortable just for the sake of being daring, provocative, well, or dirty, I don't think that is excellence.

MacF: *When you write a critical piece what do you intend it to do? Is the piece supposed to function at more than one level? What purpose(s) does it serve?*

NELSON: Really, as I said before, it is to inform. Also my work is not by any means entirely theatre reviewing, or even arts reviewing, because I am covering Ottawa policy-making and such things as the Canada Council's activities and so on, which is my main work while I am here in Ottawa.

MacF: *Do you write for a particular audience, or simultaneously for different groups in the community served by your newspaper? How do you conceive your audience(s)?*

NELSON: I think the ones that I target for are the readership of the smaller papers. The large papers have their own staffs and they have specialist reviewers in theatre, and music and in art, much more knowledgeable and practiced than I am in those particular fields. My work is more general. It happens that I do theatre in a large way, because I do the summer festivals, Shaw and Stratford, which is a very wonderful perk!

MacF: *How would you describe your philosophy of journalism? Do you subscribe to a particular ethics of criticism within the philosophy?*

NELSON: Conservative reporting. I have been around this business and Ottawa since 1946. I have covered everything from politics to trading, financing, public affairs, science, agricultural, everything, and I think my philosophy in journalism is perhaps almost old-fashioned now.

MacF: *Don't knock it!*

NELSON: I'm not knocking it, no... I find myself sometimes a little aghast at some of the younger more modern camera-toting journalists.

MacF: *How do you see your responsibilities (a) to the papers served by (CP); (b) to their readers; (c) to a production's management and investors; (d) to the professional playwrights, actors and other creative personnel connected with a production?*

NELSON: I don't feel that I have any particular responsibilities to a production's management or investors or professional playwrights -- perhaps beyond encouraging. I cannot cover all the regional theatres, but if I am going on a trip across the country, I will try to time it or schedule it where I can find new Canadian productions.

MacF: *Does your power at the box office concern you? Does it influence what you say or how you say it?*

NELSON: Not at all. There is some suspicion that some papers might be affected by their advertisers, but that does not affect the Canadian Press at all.

MacF: *Do your responsibilities as a critic include encouraging the growth and viability of professional theatre (a) in Canada? (b) in the papers served by (CP)? If so, how do you carry out this responsibility?*

NELSON: Yes, I think so, in Canada. I wouldn't judge between one metropolitan area and the next ....

MacF: *You take a national view?*

NELSON: That has been my training in the wire service. I have never worked on a paper ....

MacF: *Critics obviously need theatre. Sometimes the reverse is not felt to be as true. Would you give me your view of the mutual needs of theatre for critic and vice versa?*

NELSON: I think theatres should be aware of their need for critics, whether they are or not. I got to know Robin Phillips fairly well, and I often thought that in many of my long supper chats with him that he was getting as much out of me, in the way of reaction to various ideas he had on the state of the country, as I was getting from him.

MacF: *So to stay alive the theatre has to be in touch with reality, one aspect of which is a critic.*

NELSON: Yes.

MacF: *Are all critics failed future or resting playwrights or performers? Or does criticism in popular newspaper have creative validity of its own?*

NELSON: Well, not me. I haven't performed since I was a bunny rabbit in kindergarten and I have no talent for creative writing.

MacF: *Can criticism of a production be "right" or "wrong"?*

NELSON: In many ways it can be right or wrong, but I don't think you could define it. You might be right in praising a production, but that would be by general consensus.

MacF: *"All work is not of equal value." This appears to be a central assumption of criticism (although possibly not quite such a truism as it appears). In any case, what is it that qualifies you to decide which of the productions you see is more valuable than another? What do you discern that I might not? Why is your opinion valid?*

NELSON: I suppose it is based on years of experience and in my interest in theatre,more particularly music--operas and ballets -- goes back many years. It's been a pastime and, in a lot of my travels in other fields of reporting, I went to the theatre during off hours. I've heard the"Messiah"on a hot summer night at Christmas time in Australia. I've seen the ballet in Copenhagen in the old Royal Opera House. I've heard great organs in Rome and Paris and so forth.

This was done not with the thought of becoming a reviewer or writer in this field, but it's there in the back of my mind. Those many years-ago experiences that I had are probably colored, very rose-colored, memory, but they are there as some sort of standard.

MacF: *Do you apply different standards to different kinds of production: regional, amateur, Stratford, Broadway, classical, vernacular and so forth? If so, how is this justified?*

NELSON: Yes, I think you almost certainly do. You expect Stratford to be excellent and any flaw in Stratford is a glaring one (but not so much) in a regional or amateur. I don't cover amateur. At least I haven't done more than one or two amateur shows.

MacF: *What do you think about the problem of a writer, say in a smaller city, who has got to, or thinks he should, cover amateur things? Or maybe he is wrong.*

NELSON: Yes, I think it's the community responsibility of the local paper. We have some good amateur theatre here in the Ottawa Little Theatre - an old-established amateur theatre group. They have an excellent building of their own, and they are covered thoroughly by the Citizen.

MacF: *But the critic there, will he be a little gentler?*

NELSON: I suppose it depends on the critic. They had a show here just a few months ago written by a federal civil servant about the federal civil service, and I went to see it because it had been highly praised and there was a lot of talk about it. People were saying, "Oh you must see it." It was held over for an extra week which was difficult for an amateur theatre to do. I thought maybe here is a national story. I went to it and it was good, I suppose. It was not comfortably performed. There were one or two who were excellent, but most of them had that awkwardness .... and the story was so in that one outside of Ottawa would understand it.

MacF: *Wouldn't travel.*

NELSON: No. I went hoping it would.

MacF: *But if I go to Blyth -- it's not amateur, of course, but very good professional regional theatre, whatever that may be - - and I see, for instance He Won't Come in From the Barn (you can now tell how my tastes run)... I thoroughly enjoy* it. *I know, somehow, that there's a qualitative difference between that and a production in more impressive surroundings somewhere else. But the thing is, in that setting, in that context, for me it's a very successful production. I'm not sure I know how critics cope with these differences in kinds of excellence. Do you review something in the context in which it exists? If you go to Blyth, for instance.*

NELSON: Yes, you have to and you have to state that in your copy too. You were speaking of the Blyth Summer Festival. I have seen shows there — I don't think I was there last year. Some of it is shaky, but I think if they are a professional company, then you expect professional standards. It is a great joy when you find a young professional actor -- and there are two or three here in Ottawa fairly fresh out of theatrical school and still very young who have that spark and really take off. Benedict Campbell here in the National Arts Center company is one, and the moment he walks on stage, your eyes are just glued to the guy and he is completely at home.

MacF: *Assuming that your judgment is valid, is a judgment that disagrees with it invalid?*

NELSON: Yes, it could be. A few years ago, until I started more or less expressing my own opinion at Stratford, when I first went there, we use to carry a roundup of critics' reviews in addition to our own stories, which meant that I got, or tried to get, blacks* of everybody's copy. Well, this fell apart as more and more people are filing by video tube or telephone and there aren't blacks in the business any more. But I used to be amazed at the disparity, the variety of opinions on a given show. There would be one or two people who invariably were odd men out. I am talking of maybe ten or fifteen reviews of a single opening night. There might be ten or twelve generally good, various points of criticism, but generally good. There was one chap who would invariably take the other side and when the critics largely felt it was not an interesting show, not as well done -- perhaps why do it? ...He would just go ape over it!

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*(Newspaper terminology for carbon copies.)

MacF: *Is there an authentically sound view of a production? If so, how is it determined? (By unanimity, for instance?)*

NELSON: How it is determined, I suppose is by majority vote, a consensus.

MacF: *If there is no one "correct" critical judgment, then is (daily newspaper) criticism simply impressionistic?*

NELSON: I don't know how the reader can do this except by a long process of reading the same reviews of the various shows, but you have to know the critic. You should try to know the critic and his biases if you're reading criticism seriously.

MacF: *Maybe it goes even beyond that, you get to know a writer that you read regularly, not only his biases, but something about his life and his view.*

NELSON: Quirks. And then, I think, you can assess his judgment.

MacF: *For instance, I can read Clyde Gilmour and tell whether I'm going to like the movie -- and it has nothing to do with whether Clyde liked it.*

Can a critical statement be said to be true? If so, is one that disagrees with it false?

NELSON: No, I don't think so. You are getting into philosophy of esthetics here. If it is a critical statement, it is an opinion.

MacF: *So you just hope that the guy expressing it is cultivated by experience and ..*

NELSON: A number of papers now are labelling their reviews as opinions.

MacF: *Maybe not a bad idea if you are instructing a whole population. Can newspaper criticism itself be subjected to criticism? What are the criteria you would use if doing so?*

NELSON: Sure, a critical piece on a show can be criticized severely if certain facts of a production were overlooked or set aside by the reviewer. I think your next question probably gets into the question of how well should you know theatre people. That is a difficult area and I try to avoid it. It is difficult because I think you are there as a critic, you are there as a surrogate for the audience that is not there, and you need to know something about the show. Now how do you draw the line? I used to worry about shows that were well-known in the theatre literature, but that I had never seen or had never read. But

I tried to read them. Some of the standard classics, Chekhov, for instance. I found that that was confusing because I would create in my mind my own impressions of how this is going to look on stage, how it works on stage, and then when I went, my impression would be totally different from what was there. I talked to a critic from the Boston Globe. I asked him how did he approach a new show. He told me that he did not want to read it. He was there as a member of the audience and if it didn't get across to him, with his practice, how was it going to get across to the average audience? After he had seen the show,then he wanted the text to help him perhaps refresh his memory while writing. He was one of those critics who was able to take a day or two to write his stuff. I have difficulties, in that I have to be on the wire within an hour of curtain. And it's hell sometimes. You are writing little essays. And often the next morning I think, "Oh God, I wish I had said something else," a phrase will come to me and I wish that I had used that.

MacF: *If you were reviewing your own columns in collected form, what would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of them?*

NELSON: Well,I have never even thought of that, I can't concieve of that ever being done.

MacF: *What would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of the critical work published in the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star?*

NELSON: I have respect for both papers and I know their biases. I know Ray's interests and I know Gina's. Gina and I have dinner and lunch frequently and we talk and so on. All newspaper people do...

MacF: *Should a critic be concerned about the results of her/his writing?*

NELSON: I suppose: Publish and be damned. I don't know what results ....

MacF: *In your case I think some of the results probably, the positive result, is some awakening of interest in newspaper areas where there was none would be a thing to be pleased about. I really was thinking of metropolitan papers that could probably close a show -- that's the myth.*

NELSON: I don't know if that is so often the case. I guess it can be in the smaller theatres. But in the regional theatres, and certainly in the summer festivals, almost never have they closed a show. Shaw had a problem with their Royal George production a few years ago, some internal problems -- in the course of the summer they totally changed the cast. But they are locked into their schedule particularly if they sell subscription tickets and the show has got to go on, no matter how bad it is.

MacF: *And the public tends to have a mind of its own anyway, from time to time.*

NELSON: Oh yes.

MacF: *I think the New York public may be a special case. Can a critic enjoy friendly relationships with people whose work he/she may be called upon to judge? Do you? How do you deal with this problem?*

NELSON: No matter how well I might know Robin Phillips, I would not want to talk to Robin immediately before an opening. I am going down within the next couple of weeks to Shaw and Stratford doing some season advancers, and I talk to the directors and designers about the show that is coming up, but I wouldn't want to do that on the eve of a show. I think there is a fine line when you can become too friendly.

MacF: *What is the principal satisfaction in your line of work? Is there something you would rather do for a living?*

NELSON: There is certainly nothing I would rather do .... I am being paid a salary and expenses by the Canadian Press of all organizations, to run around the country and go to the theatre! The principal satisfaction, I suppose, is this business of discovering a potential new star, somebody really good. I get a charge out of that.

MacF: *Speaking generally, what are the objectives of daily newspaper theatrical criticism? Do you feel that they are being met by Canadian newspapers?*

NELSON: Of course, I would say no, the papers are not giving it enough space.

MacF: *What popular newspaper critic past or present do you most admire? Why?*

NELSON: Nathan Cohen. I've seen Nathan Cohen at theatres, shows, I didn't know the man, but I respected him. Clive Barnes, a sort of a model. And -- this goes back to the '30s and '40s in Toronto -- the music critic of the Globe, Hector Charlesworth. I used to read his copy. I got a lot of good solid musicological information out of it. And also the reviewer of the Manchester Guardian whose name escapes me.

MacF: *What person or body of work has had the strongest influence on your work?*

NELSON: Well -- Stratford, as a body of work, and Phillips, I think, because I just happened to come into this business when Phillips first arrived and I got to know him well.

MacF: *Have you any general comments on the social validity of theatrical criticism in popular daily newspaper?*

NELSON: I guess I have covered that.

CONCLUSION

A principal value of the present study has been its folkloric collection of the sharply divergent views of four important theatrical productions expressed by two of the country's senior newspaper drama critics, reviews of the same Stratford productions by a less opinionated national cultural journalist, and the juxtaposing of this material with all three writers' thoughts on the nature and validity of newspaper theatre criticism.

As the third writer, James Nelson of Canadian Press, noted in his interview, the role of the (CP) writer has been less to criticize than to inform; Mr. Nelson does not see himself primarily as a critic, but rather as a reviewer/reporter. With due allowance for the knowledgeable Mr. Nelson's modesty, it is reasonable to regard his role in this study as an enhancing accompaniment to, rather than a direct part of, the contrapuntal philosophical and critical variations of the two Toronto critics, Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet.

(Mr. Nelson's view of his own role reminds the author of Eddie Condon, a New York guitar player of renown who rarely took solos, but whose contribution to the development of jazz is a matter of historic record -- so, possibly, Mr. Nelson's part in the Canadian cultural aggregation.)

This essay's conclusion -- conclusionality here being used in the sense of "an outcome"* rather than in any way suggesting "a final judgment" based on this first-phase study -- begins with a study of the contents of the four critiques by Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet.

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*This and following definitions are from Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

In establishing a simple taxonomic classification of the published criticisms, the author began by dividing the information into (a) what could be assumed to have gone with the critic to the theatre and (b) what resulted from the critic's experience of that specific production. These two basic categories were labelled preformatory and impressionistic.

By preformatory,I mean anything that was available to the critic by reason of study or any intellectual or emotional experience in his/her lifetime right up to when she/he arrived at the theatre for the performance in question. It does not imply that the review was written in advance -- but rather that the material was already accessible, already formed, consciously or unconsciously, in the critic's mind or psyche.

Impressionistic means resulting from whatever transpired that night (or matinee) in the theatre. This category was then further broken down in terms of what the critic wrote (as opposed to its genesis).

First, an attempt was made to distinguish between evocation -- writing intended to recapture, re-create, make the reader share, the images, thoughts and emotions presented onstage and their immediate effect on the critic, and evaluation -- expressing the critic's precise estimation and judgment "concerning the worth, quality, significance...degree or condition of" the production.

The evaluative component was further divided into analysis ("a detailed examination of anything made to understand its nature or determine its function") and assessment (judgment of "merit or value"). The first was used for extended explanations, which could also include approbation or disapproval, and the second for more definite, direct, unembellished, final, good/bad statements.

Obviously assigning these categories is a matter of judgment, and there will always be some overlap. There is no pretence that this constitutes a precise scale, or that its application will produce results of quantitative and generalizable validity. However, in giving a notion of proportion, in adding dimensional significance, to this qualitative study, the categories and their numbers have descriptive value. The methodology was simple. The critiques were retyped. Word totals were calculated from a word/line count which was based on the average of randomly selected lines from the typescript. The typescripts were color-coded to suggest which category paragraphs, sentences, phrases and sometimes words, fit. Percentages were then calculated. Pictures, headlines, subheads, position, display elements, and the tabular matter appearing at the end of Star reviews, were not included in the comparison.

Mr. Conlogue's critiques of the four productions averaged about 800 words, Miss Mallet's 870. Mr. Nelson's reviews, by contrast, ran about 450 words -- not much more than half the length of the others. Unlike the newspaper staff critics' work, however, Mr. Nelson's is in the hands of unknown deskmen in newspapers across the land; as he points out, his challenge is getting "through the editors to the readers." While one may assume that what you read by Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet is pretty much what they wrote, almost anything can happen to Mr. Nelson's copy, including, as often occurs in member newspapers across the land, total vanishment. In any case, as indicated earlier, Mr. Nelson's reviews are not part of the direct comparison being made here.

Mr. Conlogue's review of Misanthrope was much shorter, at 800 words versus 965, than Miss Mallet's; the author counted both critics at 945 words on Coriolanus; Mr. Conlogue's Shrew was considerably shorter than Miss Mallet's (680 v. 790), and both came in at 787 words on Pinafore. The contents may be classified as follows:

MISANTHROPE

	Conlogue	Mallet
Preformatory	19%	41%
Evocatory	32	8
Analysis	29	36
Assessment	20	16

CORIOLANUS

Preformatory	10%	37%
Evocatory	26	12
Analysis	52	36
Assessment	12	15

SHREW

Preformatory	26%	21%
Evocatory	45	29
Analysis	12	31
Assessment	17	20

PINAFORE

	Conlogue	Mallet
Preformatory	13%	35%
Evocatory	23	19
Analysis	42	27
Assessment	23	20

The average percent of content devoted by each critic to the particular categories tallies as follows (the range of percentages in each classification is shown in percentage points in brackets):

	Conlogue	Mallet
Preformatory	17% (15)	34% (20)
Evocatory	32 (22)	17 (21)
Analysis	34 (40)	33 (9)
Assessment	18 (11)	18 (5)
(Average range)	(26)	(13.5)

The critics are strikingly similar in the amount of space they devoted to the judgmental Analysis and Assessment categories of these four critiques. They appear to have given just under 20 per cent of their space to saying precisely whether the production was good or bad, and just under a further 35 per cent to somewhat more detailed elaborations "made to understand its nature." In other words, only about a fifth of each review was devoted to stating directly whether the production was good or bad, and the balance of a little more than half of each piece to explaining the way in which the production functioned well or badly.

This leaves almost half of each critique; and here, in apportioning their space between evocatory and preformatory material, the two critics were in near-perfect counterposition. Conlogue gave 32 per cent of an average review over to calling up the sights, sounds and feelings of the production for his readers; Mallet used 17 per cent for the same purpose. Mallet, on the other hand, drew upon existing knowledge and experience for 34 per cent of the content of an average critique, while Conlogue, reversing the previous comparative pairing, dedicated 17 per cent to Preformatory content.

The foregoing is not presented, and should not be read, as an attempt to generalize about critics, or about these critics. Rather, the figures are an adjunct to the qualitative, descriptive study of their work during a period when they could be assumed to be functioning at the top of their form.

Similarly, what follows is not supposed to draw a definitive comparison between the two critics but only to indicate some of the characteristics of their writing on those four occasions. It is an attempt to measure accumulated explicit value references contained in the Assessment, Analysis and, occasionally, the Evocatory sections of each critic's reviews.

This examination was based on a scale ranging from extremely negative through neutral to extremely positive:

extremely	very	distinctly	somewhat		somewhat	distinctly	very	extremely
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
(negative)				(neutral)				(positive)

A tally was made by adding individual + and - references by each critic about specific aspects of each production: the overall impression and judgments concerning its direction, cast, design, costumes, lighting, and occasionally other aspects (specified). The method was to apply + and - symbols to a transcript of the critiques, color-coded for the various topic areas just outlined. The results were as follows.

	Conlogue		Mallet	
MISANTHROPE				
Overall	+ + ½ ½	(+3)	- - - -	(-4)
Director	+ +	(+2)	- - - -	(-4)
Actor				
Bedford	+ + +	(+3)	- -	(-2)
Pennell	+ + +	(+3)	-	(-1)
Hylands	+ +	(+2)	——	
Wright	+	(+1)	- 0	(-1)
Galloway	+ +	(+2)	- 0	(-1)
Flett	- - - +	(-2)	- -	(-2)
Design	+	(+1)	- - -	(-3)
Lighting	——		- - -	(-3)
TOTAL	+12		-21	
CORIOLANUS				
Overall	- - -	(-3)	+ + + + +	(+4)*
Director	- - - + +	(-1)	+ + + +	(+4)
Actor				
Cariou	- -	(-2)	+ + +	(+3)
Hylands	+ +	(+2)	+ + + +	(+4)
Gordon	- - ½	(-1.5)	+ +	(+2)
Chilcott	- -	(-2)	- -	(-2)
Griffin	+ +	(+2)	+ +	(+2)
Helpmann	-	(-1)	+ +	(+2)
O'Sullivan	-	(-1)	——	
Lighting	+ +	(+2)	+ +	(+2)
Music	——		+ +	(+2)
Other				
Battles	+ + +	(+3)	——	
TOTAL	-2.5		+23	

* 4 ("extremely") was the maximum value provided on the scale.

	Conlogue		Mallet	
SHREW				
Overall	½+ + + +	(+3.5)	- - - - - -	(-4)
Director	+ +	(+2)	- - - -	(-4)
Actor				
Cariou	+ +	(+3)	0	(0)
Gordon	+ +	(+2)	- -	(-2)
Dinicol	+	(+1)	——	
Flett	- - + -	(-2)	- -	(-2)
O'Sullivan	+	(+1)	- -	(-2)
Griffin	+ + -	(+1)	- -	(-2)
Helpmann	——		½+ + + +	(+3.5)
Design	——		+ +	(+2)
TOTAL	+11.5		-10.5	
PINAFORE				
Overall	+ - - - + -	(-2)	- - - - - -	(-4)
Director	- + - -	(-2)	- - - -	(-4)
Actor				
Terrell	- - + + - +	(0)	+ -	(0)
McLean	- + + -	(0)	+ -	(0)
Burgess	- + + -	(0)	+ -	(0)
White	+	(+1)	——	
Donkin	+ + +	(+3)	- -	(-2)
Kittask	+ -	(0)	+ -	(0)
Kern	——		+ -	(0)
Music	+	(+1)	+ + ½+	(+2.5)
Design	+ +	(+2)	- - -	(-3)
Lighting	+ +	(+2)	——	
Costumes	+ +	(+2)	-	(-1)
Other				
Theatre facade	——		- -	(-2)
Advertising	——		- -	(-2)
Seats	——		- -	(-2)
TOTAL	+7		-17.5	

* * *

One difficulty about opiniative writing is that its practitioners are often accused of doing what they set out to do -- that is, express opinions. This seems similar to the curious indictment, frequently reported in the news columns, by one politician who is charging another with politics. It is, of course, a matter of degree. No attempt is made here to set a standard of sufficiency for critical dogmatism; some characteristics of the eight critiques examined are mentioned as suggestive of the different sets that critics may bring to the job.

Miss Mallet, for instance, appears to have been more pertinacious in her view of all of the productions than Mr. Conlogue; if she was feeling positive about a play, few minuses interrupted her column of pluses. Mr. Conlogue was somewhat more inclined to see positive aspects of a play which he rated negatively overall and vice versa. So, although he judged Pinafore distinctly negatively overall, his positive observations under all headings outnumbered the negatives and, in fact, brought his total to +7.

Matching the total tally of each critic's positive and negative references presents a similar contrast. Miss Mallet disliked Misanthrope (-21) almost twice as much as Mr. Conlogue liked it (+12), and liked Coriolanus (+23) about eight times as much as he disliked it (-2.5). Their disagreement on Shrew was almost perfectly balanced (Conlogue: +11.5; Mallet: -10.5), and, although he did not exactly recommend a voyage on it, Mr. Conlogue found +7 worth of positive things to say about Pinafore, while Miss Mallet discovered more than twice as many negatives, including, it should be pointed out, the theatre's facade, the advertising campaign and the seats in the balcony front row of the Avon.

One incidental result of this analysis of the critiques was a suggestion of the critics' perplexity in dealing with such a mixed vehicle as Pinafore. In factual terms, the two disagreed about the nature of Gilbert's writing ("mild social satirists in their day": Conlogue); ("Gilbert drew blood with his satire ... his claws were very sharp when he set about savaging contemporary politicians and social mores": Mallet). More significantly, their evaluative structure seemed to give them no room to assess an outstandingly good singer who was an inadequate actor. Miss Mallet offered a justification for this by suggesting that the director had (presumably inappropriately) approached the piece "as opera rather than operetta" -- in fact, the D'Oyly Carte was an Opera company and its members, the sole custodians of Gilbert and Sullivan until the copyrights ran out in recent years, regarded their entertainments as operas, and frowned on the use of the other word to describe them. That aside, in this instance, Mr. Conlogue and Miss Mallet both appeared to begin from a position which could be described, perhaps less than fairly, as "the music was great. Now here is what was wrong with the show." All of which simply illustrates that people who criticize critics can be just as pervicacious as their subjects.

* * *

The author, indeed, is not the only person to draw attention to the contrariwise relationship of the two Toronto critics' Stratford opening views. Michael Cobden, writing in the Kingston Whig Standard of July 19, 1981, observed:

> I have to be careful what I say about Mr. Conlogue and Ms. Mallet. I certainly do not want to criticize them, because

> they may be as sensitive to criticism as most critics. But their reviews of these two Stratford Fertival productions (Misanthrope and Coriolanus) do make one wonder again about the validity and value of criticism, and especially about its purpose.

Mr. Cobden says that what he wants to learn from the review of a play

> ... is whether or not my understanding of life -- my life itself -- is likely to be enriched by going to see it.

Mr. Cobden quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson with approval:

> Criticism should not be querulous and wasting, all knife and root-puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind.

(Mr. Cobden sadly concludes that much contemporary criticism "is an east wind.")

The notion of "validity" applied to the whole idea of newspaper theatre criticism -- as opposed to its use to describe the soundness or cogency of examples of the genre -- probably centres on the question of whether criticism is justifiable: its "ability to effect or accomplish what is designed or intended."

The first conclusory observation (and potential hypothesis for further study) of this essay is:

1. There is widespread confusion, and conflicting opinion, about the designs and intentions of newspaper theatre criticism.

Another theme emerging from the critiques and the views expressed by the critics is:

2. Critics are generally believed to devote more of their writing to the purely evaluative function than is the case.

A third hypothetical observation arising directly from the preceding one is:

3. *Although critics rightly believe they devote a good deal of attention to expression that goes beyond direct value judgments, a reader's perception of what the critic has written will be almost entirely overshadowed by the evaluative component.*

One way of establishing artistic (and social) validity for journalistic criticism would be to demonstrate its practical truth. This study seems to emphasize the impossibility of this conception, and the apprehension, at least by the critics, that the truth in criticism is largely an internal matter between the critic and him/her self. A further hypothesis/theme, therefore, is:

4. *Daily newspaper readers take such an over-literal view of the writing of their papers' theatre critics that they misinterpret what the critic has to say; that they (more significantly than the theatre community) cause the critic's words to be "graven in stone".*

Sympathy was expressed for the professional affected by a review (they have children), but both critics felt that the effect of a review was irrelevant to its creation. In addition, all three writers interviewed downplayed a critic's ability "to close a show". The theme the author hears from these observations is twofold:

5. *(a) Critics underestimate the effect their writing has on individual professionals. They may not shut a show, but they do provide the public record (for both posterity and the casting director of the next production). And*

(b) critics tend to share with journalists generally an inadequate philosophical justification for the practical human effects of their writing.

The unmistakable vivacity and impact of both Conlogue and Mallet's writing style; their ability, on the one hand to create compelling images and on the other to wield an epigrammatic épée leads to a suggestion that, not only are both journalists gifted writers, but also:

6. The principal value received by a newspaper critic's public is that of a "good read" -- with no specific functional relationship to the production in question (such as possible attendance, an interest in drama, etc.). And this is true despite the fact that readers are primarily conscious of the critic's evaluatory role. In other words, the author of this essay has come to the belief that, in consuming newspaper criticism, readers see one thing: judgment, and do an unrelated thing: enjoy.

(The above, to return just once more to the jazz idiom, is by way of being one of many illustrations in life that,"It ain't what you do, it's the way what you do it." ...)

A problem within criticism, rather than having to do with the role of criticism itself, concerns the validation of critical standards, which, by (possibly the only) agreement among all of the critics, has to do entirely with the critic's self-evaluated superiority in experience and standards, the fact that the critic has the job. This is as unsound a justification as it is honest; and it has a further problem to add to its arbitrary assignment of wisdom to the critic by the critic, that of potential satiety. Does the "sensitized palate" lead to the over-full stomach, the over-cossetted appetite; the spoiled, and ultimately picky, eater?

(One need only think, for analogy's sake, of the food critic's mortified squall on discovering a single wilted lettuce leaf after the paté has been consumed. Salmonella itself could inspire no greater outrage.)* Therefore, the following hypothesis:

7. A journalist critic, unlike an academic, must write with some degree of relation to his audience (however true to his/her own self that writing may be). However, by experience, training and repeated exercise of the calling, the critic inevitably develops tastes and standards that bear no similarity to those of (a) readers, (b) theatregoers and, reasonably enough, (c) theatre professionals who are, of more direct necessity, audience conscious.

The theatregoing public, the critics point out, forms only a small part of the critic's audience. It seems likely to the author that this component of a critic's readership may have special characteristics and a special approach to the reading of newspaper criticism. A theme for further study here advanced as pure speculation is that:

8. Regular theatregoers tend to find critics more jaded than judicious, and there is little connection, therefore, between the critic's standards and those of his/her readers who have the strongest relationship with the subjects of his/her writing.

*see also Gilbert and Sullivan, Patience, Act I:

DUKE. Yes, and toffee in moderation is a capital thing. But to *live* on toffee -- toffee for breakfast, toffee for dinner, toffee for tea -- to have it supposed that you care for nothing *but* toffee, and that you would consider yourself insulted if anything but toffee were offered to you -- how would you like *that*?
COL. I can quite believe that, under those circumstances, even toffee would become monotonous!

This study points to the apparent lack of a consistent rationale for newspaper criticism existing outside the ego, mind, emotions and talents of the individual critic. Newspaper criticism appears to be individualistic, impressionistic, egocentric, idiosyncratic, and to have, on the one hand, justified artistic pretensions of its own, and on the other, possibly quite limited understanding of the people who operate -- and consume -- the media in which it appears.

Part of the difficulty is in criticism's largely implicit claims for specialness, for status transcending the qualities of other journalism -- and yet these more ordinary qualities seem to describe the nature of newspaper criticism quite well. One classical formulation, for instance, of the reasons people seek out ordinary news listed the following: For information about public affairs and for interpretation of that information; for information of immediate use in daily living; for respite, or escape, from the routine of everyday life; for prestige; for contact with society; for the pleasure of reading; for reassurance, and as a ritual; for stimulation.[52]

9. *Is it possible that daily newspaper criticism is only "news" after all? If so, does this make it more or less valid?*

The author leaves this and all of the other themes emerging from this study with one further observation by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Self Reliance), this one of value to both critics and their critics: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

* * *

APPENDIX I: ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

[1] I use the word here to mean laying down rules that journalists can be expected to follow, rather than, as in Monaco (*infra*, p. 310), a theory (prescriptive) that concerns itself with what a film ought to be, rather than a theory (descriptive) devoted to what the film is.

[2] Smith (*infra*, pp. 111, 112) uses "meta-criticism" in what I think is a rather narrow sense of criticizing criticism by examining, for instance, whether a particular issue is the correct one for critical analysis. My use of "meta-criticism" is meant to convey a discipline dealing critically with criticism broadly defined to include the taxonomic analytic theories of critical writing.

[3] Ostry, Bernard. The Cultural Connection. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), p. 1.

[4] Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 3.

[5] Ibid., 4.

[6] Ibid., 5.

[7] Ibid., 8.

[8] Ibid., 354.

[9] Monaco, James. How to Read a Film. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 12.

[10] Scott, Wilbur R. Five Approaches of Literary Criticism. (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 11, 12, 13.

[11] Monaco. op. cit. 312.

[12] Ibid., 249.

[13] Chang, Won H. "A Typology Study of Movie Critics," Journalism Quarterly, 52:4, Winter 1975, pp. 721-725.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Monaco. op. cit. pp. 248-250.

[16] Chang (*op. cit.*) studied thirty eight New York critics' reviews of eighty-one movies, and basing his analysis on which movies they liked and disliked, created a typology consisting of Type I (elite critics), Type II (*auteurist* critics) and Type III (entertainer critics).

[17] Cohen, Nathan. Remarks on CBC program "Critically Speaking" in 1948, quoted in Edmonstone, Wayne E. *Nathan Cohen, the Making of a Critic*. (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Limited, 1977), p. 107.

[18] Smith, Robert Rutherford. *Beyond the Wasteland*. (Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication, 1980), pp. 4, 5.

[19] Smith. *op. cit.* 104.

[20] Levitt, Paul M. *A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama*. (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1971), p. 1.

[21] Nathan, George Jean. *The Critic and the Drama*. (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses Incorporated, 1972) (first published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1922), p. 13.

[22] Levitt. *op. cit.* 22.

[23] Nathan. *op. cit.* 11.

[24] Nathan. *op. cit.* 143.

[25] Nathan. *op. cit.* foreword.

[26] Kerr, Walter. *Pieces at Eight.* Quoted in Bladel, Roderick. *Walter Kerr: An Analysis of his Criticism*. (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1976), p. 21.

[27] Bliss, Isabel St. John. *Edward Young*. (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1969), pp. 63, 64.

[28] Nathan. *op. cit.* 20.

[29] Edmonstone. *op. cit.* 208.

[30] Pound Ezra. "A Retrospect," from *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (1954)*, T. S. Elliot ed., reprinted in Lodge, David, ed. *20th Century Literary Criticism*. (London: Longman, 1972), p. 59.

[31] Bladel. op. cit. 15.

[32] Bladel. loc. cit.

[33] Tamblyn Lecture. University of Western Ontario, October, 1981.

[34] Cardus, Neville. "Foreword," in Harold Downs, The Critic in the Theatre. (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1953).

[35] Bladel. op. cit. 21.

[36] Bladel. op. cit. 174.

[37] Nathan. op. cit. 3, 4.

[38] Edmonstone. op. cit. 108, 109.

[39] Bladel. op. cit. 19.

[40] Friedman, Sidney J. Critical Standards and Assumptions in New York Daily Newspapers' Theatre Reviews, 1955-56. (State University of Iowa, Department of Speech and Dramatic Art, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1966), pp. 185, 186 (quoted by Bladel op. cit.).

[41] Smith. op. cit. 4, 5.

[42] Downs. op. cit. 3.

[43] Downs. op. cit.

[44] Edmonstone. op. cit. 146.

[45] Edmonstone. loc. cit.

[46] Levitt. op. cit. 22.

[47] Levitt. op. cit. 83.

[48] Bladel. op. cit. 16.

[49] Nathan. op. cit.

[50] Edmonstone. op. cit. 113, 114

[51] The article, in the Financial Post Magazine, February, 1982, listed, among "names to know" ... Gina Mallet "known as 'The Hammer' because of her 'vituperative pen'" and "the Globe and Mail's Ray Conlogue, who's young and concerned."

[52] Kimball, Penn. "People Without Papers," Public Opinion Quarterly, v. 23 (1959), pp. 389 - 398.

APPENDIX II:

THE CRITIQUES AS THEY APPEARED IN PRINT

Excellent Misanthrope is high-quality comedy

BY RAY CONLOGUE

Brian Bedford and Pat Galloway: Stratford hits its stride.

STRATFORD — I'm sure everybody breathed a sigh of relief at Monday night's beautifully drawn production of The Misanthrope.

After a self-conscious start with H. M. S. Pinafore in the afternoon, Stratford hit its accustomed pace with Moliere's great comedy about the misanthrope who would flee the hypocrisy of the world — if only he weren't in love with the most dishonest woman in Paris.

When the lights come up on Desmond Heeley's set, a green distillation of a Louis XIV formal garden, Brian Bedford as Alceste is telling off his friend Philinte (Nicholas Pennell) for his slavish adherence to one of the rules of that formal society: always flatter. With grace and force Alceste builds his argument that you must be cruelly honest with shoddy people in order to sincerely care about the good ones. Pennell's Philinte, wearing rueful compassion in his eyes, counterargues forcefully, but his real strength is the strength of his good sense: he is like a still and benign pool.

There was a rich and attentive quality to the audience's laughter as the two men — leaving us aware of the grace of Moliere's language without once slipping into the sing-song trap that awaits rhyming couplets on the English-speaking stage — gradually built the tension of the argument until, at the first sign of genuine anger in Alceste, Philinte delicately tips the conversation toward Alceste's one weakness: the beautiful Celimene, who amuses herself by leading on any number of suitors at the same time.

In the subsequent scenes, where by a painful and humiliating progression of events Alceste is made to see how Celimene has made a fool of him, there are many occasions for high comedy (by which I mean a rueful laughter of recognition) as well as a lot of farce with the fops Acaste and Clitandre — also, of course, in love with Celimene.

Nobody else in the cast comes near the purity of the approach to Moliere in that first scene between Alceste and Philinte, but there are several performers in different styles who contribute outstandingly. Scott Hylands is the terrible poet Oronte, who forces Alceste to pass judgment on his sonnet and then persecutes him for his honesty: he has a robust virility in his self-presentation, like a street fighter turned poet who will certainly flatten the nose of any detractor.

Susan Wright, as Eliante, is peculiarly moving in the little shudder she gives when Alceste betrays his anger at Celimene. Without saying another word, she conveys that she is in love with him, but is smart enough to see he is intrigued only by impossible challenges. A gifted comedienne, Miss Wright also moved very far Monday night toward establishing herself as an actress of wider talent.

Pat Galloway returns to Stratford to play Arsinoe, the shrew who masks her unattractiveness to men in a show of disdain for them. Like Bedford and Pennell, she brought a depth of confidence to the role that established its authority without for a moment overbalancing it. This aging reputation-wrecker, by the way she touches her pencil to her nose or picks up a book on a table, betrays an inner turmoil of envy and hatefulness that makes her sly set pieces devastatingly funny.

Sherry Flett was a disappointing Celimene. In her first engagement with the vast interior of the Festival Theatre, it was all she could do to project her voice and the first layer of Celimene's personality: a heartless bitch. When Acaste and Clitandre lead her on in vicious gossip about other men at court, she fails to leaven her malice with the charm that would explain why men are attracted to her. After all, not even a lovesick male is going to step into a bear trap unless it is disguised with a little greenery.

It's perhaps unfair to compare her reading of the lines with masters such as Bedford or Pennell, but an audience listening to these two is going to be looking for the [illegible] wealth of nuance and humor [illegible] everybody on stage. Miss Flett [illegible] all the payload in her lines. There [illegible] some compensation in her arch [illegible] striking physicality, and the values she did go after — "incorrigible triviality" in translator Richard Wilbur's words — were strongly enough established to make the spectator's blood boil. But there was no hint of remorse when she was finally exposed, or [illegible] humanity — [illegible] seems to [illegible] Moliere was [illegible] enough [illegible] to absolve her.

Jean Gascon's direction seems effortless, quite an achievement on the Festival stage. For a director who has not always worked well at Stratford, it is gratifying to see him succeed in moving the values of French classicism so amusingly and gracefully onto an English stage.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Moliere deserves better

And Bedford has the wit to make a finer job of it

GINA MALLET

at Stratford

Curiously lackluster: Gina Mallet was disappointed with Brian Bedford's Alceste in Stratford's Misanthrope, particularly when he seems to have been born to play the role.

STRATFORD — Times are hard, morale is low, and money, so they say, is scarce as hen's teeth.

The Stratford Festival has had a well-advertised rough year. Still, it barely seems possible, in fact, it is hardly in the realm of credibility that the new Stratford administration would actually allow the opening production on the Festival Theatre stage to be little more than a reading.

Yet that is all The Misanthrope is, and an uninspired reading at that. What's more, the description errs only on the side of kindness.

There is something wholly debilitating and eventually infuriating in watching actors such as Brian Bedford, Pat Galloway, Nicholas Pennell and Susan Wright promenade around the Festival stage like a roomful of manikins, adopting elaborately artificial poses as they throw off the rhyming couplets of Richard Wilbur's excellent translation of Moliere's comedy manque, without appearing to have connected any of the words to their own feelings.

Born to play role

It must be added that they are placed at a disadvantage by the stage itself. Appallingly decorated with artificial turf the shade of preppy green, and garnished with plastic trees, the Festival stage has never looked uglier. Moreover, operating room lighting renders the entire cast as blanched as sprightly octogenarians — an appearance which should have had the actors' agents on the telephone first thing today.

But how, you will ask, can such a cast fail to bring The Misanthrope to life? Bedford in particular seems to have been born to play the priggish Alceste, the last honest man, or something like that, in the worldly and mendacious France of Louis XIV? And perhaps one day Bedford will fulfil the role. As it is now, Bedford, who is giving a performance that seems unbelievably lackluster when ranged alongside his Benedick and Malvolio of last year, is working without a context. The fact is that Jean Gascon, himself a former artistic director of the festival, has obviously provided no concept for the production. He has just put the play on stage and left it there.

What a mistake. The Misanthrope may be generally considered Moliere's finest achievement, yet for the majority of theatre-goers, the claim has to be proved. It isn't as accessible as School For Wives or half as funny as Tartuffe. The Misanthrope is remote, intellectual, highly stylized and it demands a level and intensity of performance to provoke continuous argument. And more than Moliere's other plays, it also requires a framework to make it accessible to audiences today.

First of all, who are these people? Why are they made to appear out of nowhere? What rank do they belong to? Alceste is railing against his society? Why can't we know more about the society through the nuances of behavior and the development of character?

And what is Alceste railing at? From this production, it often seemed he was just grumbling because his friends and acquaintances led sensual lives. We can see that the drug of candor drives away friends and allies alike, that it causes lawsuits and makes him unable to be lived with. But we need to see how it comes into conflict with his sudden passion for his opposite, Celimene, a young woman as transparent and false as he is serious and true. He would reform her. When she refuses to be reformed, he immediately ceases to love her.

If Alceste did not tell the truth with the kind of blunt wit that takes the malice out of his frankness, he would be dismissed as a bad joke. As it is, he can be made (and surely Bedford on a better day could make him into a grouch on the order of Jack Benny) a party-pooper with a single line.

Flirts with tragedy

And he can be made more of. The Misanthrope flirts with tragedy. Alceste is looking into the heart of the human situation. By his refusal to play political games or to build his life on subtle evasion and skilful fibs, he avoids the cheap triumphs of charm. There can be both irony and pathos in his loss of Celimene and her loss of him. As it is now, there is only a faint air of puzzlement.

At the level of this production, it seems much more likely that they will kiss and make up and go off and get married — whereas, of course, what should be revealed is the profound incompatibility of the lovers that indicates not merely two hostile parties in this battle of the sexes, but a deeper kind of incompatibility that rents all human relationships.

But to reach such depths, the play must first fully engage the audience.

In the early '70s, the British National Theatre produced a contemporary version of The Misanthrope which was set in the imperial presidency of Charles de Gaulle, and the updating did the play a world of good. There were all these chic Parisian intellectuals mauling and scratching and worrying over fine points of philosophy, a context that made the play immediately accessible as well as immediately engaging. Getting in tune with Louis XIV requires a different kind of headset.

It is expected that the director of a play like The Misanthrope will try hard to find the right headset to tune his audience in. Gascon should also have struggled to find the right Celimene. Sharry Flett is a truly delightful actress, but she is far too soft and gentle and yielding to ever play Celimene, a lady who is adept at sadomasochism and loves cutting people off at the knees in a way that has them begging for more.

Susan Wright and Pat Galloway, in the roles of Eliante and Arsinoe, have little more to do than make brief enlivening appearances, albeit without much sense of what they are doing, while Nicholas Pennell is suave but purposeless as Philinte.

The Misanthrope:
By Moliere. English verse translation by Richard Wilbur. Directed by Jean Gascon. [illegible] Desmond Heeley. Music by [illegible]. Lighting by [illegible]. Festival Theatre.

H.M.S. Pinafore review is on page C4

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bedford praised for role in Festival Theatre opening

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

Brian Bedford—a British-born American actor whose characteristically austere mannerisms on stage fitted him ideally for the part — won an ovation in the title role in Moliere's The Misanthrope at the formal opening of the Stratford Festival Monday night.

Irascible, scornful of society's insincerities and the world's follies, Moliere's hero Alceste turns his back on mankind and goes off to seek peace of mind in some kind of 17th Century hermitage.

But could anyone really cast himself out from the luxurious grace of Louis XIV's court circle, vividly brought to the stage by designer Desmond Heeley, and the feminine charms of his first and second loves as played by Sharry Flett and Susan Wright?

It is only the second time in Stratford Festival history that a non-Shakespeare play has opened the season in the 2,000-seat Festival Theatre. The other occasion was in 1974 when William Hutt starred in The Imaginary Invalid.

Both productions were directed by Jean Gascon, and of course both are by Moliere, the near contemporary of Shakespeare who is France's great contribution to classical theatre.

Entering his fifth season in the festival, Bedford plays the disdainful hero well. His solemn face, masterful use of the long pause between thoughts, and determined stance set him apart from all other actors.

Nicholas Pennell, a Stratford veteran, plays Alceste's friend, Philinte, with understanding and slight amusement. Scott Hylanus, in his first Stratford season, is Alceste's rival for the love of Celimene.

As Celimene, Sharry Flett, also in her first Stratford role, is a bewitching creature whom Moliere has given high social station and wealth, and a mischievously roving heart. Alceste suffers the heartbreak as long as he can before he throws her over.

Susan Wright, star of last season's A Flea in her Ear at the Shaw Festival, is Eliante, Celimene's cousin and the second-best object of Alceste's love. In the end she rejects him and turns to Philinte.

Pat Galloway, long a Stratford star, has the catty role of Arsinoe, the "friend" who loves to gossip. The scene between Flett and Galloway, as each relates the latest scandal about the other, is a gem that would alone make the whole evening worthwhile.

The Beacon Herald
Tuesday, June 16, 1981

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Coriolanus dies under the knife

BY RAY CONLOGUE

STRATFORD — The most surprising thing about Brian Bedford, who acts Shakespeare with rueful comedy, is the dark and louring view of the same playwright he reveals when he puts on his director's hat.

In Titus Andronicus there was a bloody and golden splendor about this vision; in Coriolanus, which opened Tuesday night, the same values were stillborn. What should have held ceremonial majesty betrayed ceremonial tedium. What could have been complex settled for being bombastic.

It's easy to point a finger at this late play — "seldom acted," as Bradley once mentioned, adding that "perhaps no reader ever called it his favorite." But Titus is equally neglected. In both cases Bedford tries to bring eclipsed Shakespeare back into the light by heavy cutting of the text, by rich and stirring lighting effects and visual tableaux, and by requesting a certain style of acting from the cast.

In Coriolanus he has straightaway dumped all the comic relief. No ill-bred Roman commoners bat solecisms like "directitude" back and forth. If this has not made things severe enough, Bedford also ends several scenes at their climactic moments, leaving out the falling action that softens the characters or fleshes out their motives. So we have Coriolanus, who has abandoned Rome and now leads an army of his former enemies against its gates, yielding finally to the pleading of his mother, Volumnia. But the aside of Aufidius, the enemy general with whom Coriolanus is now in uneasy alliance, is deleted. Again, when Aufidius has betrayed Coriolanus to his murderers, his too-late moment of penitence ("My rage is gone, and I am struck with sorrow") is delivered in a spiteful and mean-spirited fashion.

These observations are not nit-picking. The cuts, the delivery are essential to the spare, relentless, single-minded exposition of warrior valor which Bedford has in mind. But Coriolanus, bereft of sub-plot and poetry even as Shakespeare left it, does not need further sandblasting. The play, which in a sympathetic interpretation would be a spare essay in Roman architecture, becomes in Bedford's hands a bomb-shattered ruin.

Ruins have their charms, and Bedford as director has his talents. Together with Michael Whitfield's extraordinary lighting, he has created visual tableaux that must be among the most striking ever seen on the stage. The opening, with a crescent of dimly lit, prone and tangled, malevolently sighing peasants ranged up and down the staircases, Coriolanus' dash into the hideously backlit gates of the city of Corioles; the semi-circle of Volscian officers ranged along the front row of seats while Aufidius denounces Coriolanus — all these demonstrate a controlling and strong esthetic. And he has encouraged Arne Zaslove to stage the battles in striking, ritualistic fashion which in the riveting, almost erotic single combat between Coriolanus and Aufidius generated a round of applause by itself.

But why does Bedford, who speaks Shakespeare with unusual intelligence, allow (or, is it possible, even encourage) the bellowing assault on the lines that we hear from Len Cariou's Coriolanus right down to the meanest Volscian sentry?

In Cariou's case there is a problem with the actor himself. Sweeney Todd was a useful target for Cariou's ample virility, but that virility in Shakespearean roles (including the Macbeth we saw in Toronto last fall) does not work very well. It's not that Cariou isn't doing the lines well; he is confident and intelligent. But there is a clipped, snarling tone combined with a jaw-clenching motion reminiscent of a nutcracker that declares out loud: "Here I am, working at being a tough guy." The harder he works at it, the more Cariou points up the absence of a lean, hawk-like quality to his virility [illegible] that Scott Hylands as Aufidius masters in abundance.

Len Cariou (left) and Lewis Gordon: play suffers from cuts.

Hyland, who demonstrated quality in The Misanthrope earlier this week, shows with his Aufidius that he is one of the lucky catches of the new Stratford company. He is muscled like a whippet, menacing as a gila monster and perhaps the only actor who could make the "shredded savagery" cliche of Desmond Heeley's Volscian costumes look actually savage. It remains to be seen whether these qualities can be magnified for leading roles.

Lewis Gordon, an actor of whom I am more fond than some, seems to have been chosen to give the role of Coriolanus' friend Menenius a fatherly warmth. This he does, in excess. It was a relief against the predominant macho pounding, but only once did I feel he threw himself heart and soul into his role — and that was for a few brief but very touching moments deluding himself against a sentry's [illegible] after Coriolanus has rejected him. It's too bad that genuineness wasn't a feature throughout the evening.

Barbara Chilcott, a commanding, carnivorous presence as Coriolanus' mother, was nonetheless a disappointment. Perpetual quivering of the vocal cords is no substitute for properly feeling one's way through a part. Her pleading with her son, which could have been most moving, was hard to listen to.

Lynne Griffin in the thankless role of Coriolanus' wife had little to do but play mater dolorosa (more accurately, uxor dolorosa) and played it very well. She invested her few and baldly written lines with great feeling. Max Helpmann and Barney O'Sullivan as the tribunes who unseat Coriolanus did to death the demagoguery of their roles. It may be that Shakespeare "loathed the common Englishman," but it's not necessary in performing him to pander to his [illegible]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Brian Bedford the real hero

Superb direction of Coriolanus builds spine-tingling production

GINA MALLET

at Stratford

Playing politics: Len Cariou is Coriolanus and Barbara Chilcott is his mother, Volumnia, at Stratford. Cariou can also be seen locally in current movie, The Four Seasons.

STRATFORD — The Stratford Festival was jolted alive last night with a big, noisy, macho production of Coriolanus that set the Festival Theatre pulsating.

Shakespeare's coldly objective study of Roman realpolitik has been fired into a hot clash of caste and class warfare, with plebeians and patricians, not to mention barbarians, fighting it out all over the stage and into the aisles.

Coriolanus is politics in the raw — the machinations of demagogues combining with powermongers' manipulations to bring Rome itself to its knees. And in this production, which has been directed with a tingling intensity by Brian Bedford, the punches are all bloody bare knuckles.

From the prowling, swarming, threatening Roman mob to Len Cariou's rigidly self-righteous Coriolanus, and from the savagery of the wolf-headed Volscians to their leader Aufidius, played superbly and with the unrelenting pressure of a piledriver by Scott Hylands, Coriolanus, after a shaky start and a certain unevenness, builds unerringly and with increasing excitement to its dire climax.

Large cast

Last year, Bedford's production of Titus Andronicus was one of the season's critical successes. With Coriolanus, a very different kind of play, and only his second production at Stratford, Bedford shows himself to be a master of the Festival's thrust stage, deploying his large cast in and around it with the strategy of a general and the fluidity of a movie maker.

The Festival stage has rarely been used to such effect since Richard III in 1977. And with the same kind of straightforwardness that made Titus so accessible.

Bedford plunges us immediately into the heart of Coriolanus' tumult with a singular effect. In the dark, we hear the sound of the mob panting. The lights go up on a starving Rome deprived of food by the apparently callous ruling class. The centre, personified by Lewis Gordon's compassionate Menenius, cannot hold.

In the manner of labor relations today, the hardliners take over. The peoples' tribunes are ranged against the most intransigent of patricians, Coriolanus, an iron general who believes that democracy will ruin Rome. For saying so, this hero is refused the consulship by the inflamed mob, and banished from Rome.

"There is a world elsewhere," cries Coriolanus as he flees the city that has rejected him. But there isn't. One of the morals of this production is that the whole world is politics; the cut and thrust of deal-making is everywhere, and the man who disdains politics, and its part in human relationships, disdains life.

Coriolanus has in the past sometimes been interpreted to suit particular ideologies; it offers plenty of opportunities to propagandize any party line. But the only true villain is mob psychology, which is seen to betray and distort the best intentions.

Watching Coriolanus is like watching the machinery of politics in action. It isn't a pretty sight. But it is fascinating. While you can't but sympathize with Coriolanus' opinion of democracy as shabby, you can't ignore, either his detractors' suspicions of his motivations. By being true to himself only, he appears false to others. He is led into a false relationship with his former enemy, Aufidius, whom he then joins to attack Rome only to be deterred somewhat surprisingly at the last by his mother.

Least convincing

Amazing, because Coriolanus' capitulation to his mother's pleas turns out to be the least convincing part of this production. Coriolanus is a man's play and never more so than here, and only a Volumnia still more stern and unyielding than her son could seem to be a convincing pleader. Barbara Chilcott is unyielding all right, but she is not overbearing enough, and that makes Aufidius' final jeer that Coriolanus is a mama's boy seem rather too apt. But this doesn't dovetail with what has gone before, namely, a Coriolanus who, once set on a course, cannot be deterred by anyone, any emotion or any ideology.

Otherwise, however, the play proceeds with an inexorable logic. True, some of the intricacies in the political shuffling get lost, but there are so many intricacies in this play that it hardly seems surprising. The main thing is that the play's line remains strong and true throughout.

Cariou takes his time warming up as Coriolanus. He begins so rigidly that one wonders where he can go from there. But by the time Coriolanus is forced to try to play politics with the mob, he has fragmented into ambition, pride and conviction. After he has succumbed to his mother's pleas, Cariou's Coriolanus essays a pathos that further complicates and enriches his performance.

Ultimately, he is a figure of compelling ambiguity, and he is beautifully matched and complemented by Scott Hylands' single-minded Aufidius, the barbarian who stands in ever starker contrast to Coriolanus.

With his angular frame robed in feathers, Hylands is a primitive force that respects only hardness and courage, and when Coriolanus falters it seems entirely natural that Aufidius will kill him.

There are other outstanding performances: Max Helpmann's Sicinius is a people's tribune who stands comparison to the Teamsters' boss, and Lewis Gordon is both dignified and moving as the civilized Menenius, while Lynne Griffin is only too pathetic as the abandoned Virgilia, Coriolanus' complaisant wife.

Clanging soundscape

Michael Whitfield's lighting is scenery itself; Desmond Heeley's costumes are agreeably undistracting, and Gabriel Charpentier has provided a clanging soundscape which vibrates ominously.

But the evening's hero is really Bedford, who had a large amount of success wrestling with a very intricate play.

Coriolanus:
By William Shakespeare. Directed by Brian Bedford. Designed by Desmond Heeley. Soundscape by Gabriel Charpentier with Marcel de Lambre and Jean Sauvageau. Lighting by Michael J. Whitfield. Festival Theatre.

Sid Adilman's column is on page B5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Coriolanus' final act performed 'stunningly' says theatre reviewer

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

Len Cariou, returning to the Stratford Festival where he palyed secondary roles nearly 20 years ago, received a standing ovation Tuesday night at the opening of Coriolanus, directed by Brian Bedford.

More recently a Broadway musical star, with a Tony award for Sweeney Todd, Cariou in the title role led one of the largest casts in recent years on the Stratford stage with Barbara Chilcott as his domineering mother, Lewis Gordon as his friend in the Roman senate and Max Helpmann as one of the tribunes of the people.

The play is rarely performed because of its sprawling battle scenes and other difficulties of staging by anything other than a large company of actors. More than 30 played unnamed parts as soldiers, senators, citizens and the Roman rabble.

The play's story is out of the mists of Roman history. Caius Martius is a powerful commander who leads the Roman army to put down an attack by the neighboring Volscians. For his victory, he is given the name Coriolanus and offered the title of consul of Rome.

But he is too proud to bare his wounds before the common citizenry, as is the custom to win their approval for the consulship.

Denied the consulship, he deserts Rome and joins the Volscians in an attack on Rome until his family appeals to him for mercy. Bending tearfully to his mother, he is denounced by the Volscians as a traitor and is slain.

In Bedford's production, Cariou falls from the stage balcony into the crowd and Caius Martius Coriolanus comes close to being ripped apart. He dies at centre stage with his arms and legs twisted in the form of a swastika.

Bedford, in his fifth season here as an actor and, in this, his second assignment as a director, used the whole festival theatre as his stage. The soldiers and crowds of Romans swarmed up and down the aisles while music and sound swirled around the audience from all sides.

Not all the lines came through clearly as actors let their passions rule over their diction in many of the opening scenes, but the context of the action carried over that difficulty and the final act was stunningly and absorbingly performed.

Desmond Heeley provided a range of Roman togas, patrician and plebian costumes in shades of ivory and autumnal brown. The higher the rank of the person, the lighter the shade — a help in keeping everyone sorted out. The Volscians were garbed in copper-colored, fringed leathers and furs, looking like savages.

Cariou last appeared here in 1964 and 1965 and accompanied the Stratford company when it went to England to play at the Chichester Festival where the stage is patterned after Stratford's.

Barbara Chilcott, a pioneer and now one of the grand dames of Canadian theatre, has been longer away from Stratford. She appeared here in 1954 and 1955 playing Katharina in The Taming of the Shrew.

The Beacon Herald
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

Globe and Mail Friday, June 17, 1981

Tame Shrew offers a chance to laugh

BY RAY CONLOGUE

STRATFORD — Novelty interpretations of Shakespeare plays are usually optional, but in the case of The Taming of the Shrew they are obligatory. You can have brainwashed shrews, duplicitous shrews, harlot shrews; any kind of shrew you want except a tamed one. The taming of women is frowned on today.

That's why it was a guilty pleasure to ease into Peter Dews' uncomplicated production of the play at Stratford Wednesday night. There was Kate gaily annihilating herself in the closing speech (the one everybody chokes on), and surely that was that. Wasn't it?

But no. Here at the end returns Christopher Sly, the drunken peasant duped into thinking he was a lord in the opening scene. It was for him that the strolling players performed this Taming of the Shrew, and Dews had made the whole thing look like a sixteenth-century vaudeville entertainment. Tranio had nudged Biondello when the poor clown looked like he had forgotten his lines; a serving girl had dashed on with placards identifying the locale of the next scene; Petruchio waggled his outstretched hands from time to time like a nightclub emcee encouraging applause.

Well and good. But in Shakespeare's play Christopher Sly does not come back at the end. This final scene, in which he wakes up and concludes the whole thing was a dream, is lifted from somebody else's play, an earlier effort called The Taming of a Shrew. It ends with the deluded Sly rushing off to "tame" his ferocious wife — and no doubt meeting the fate of any man dumb enough to think he rules the roost.

It's a cute "out" from the Shrew dilemma. It lets the whole Shakespeare play be treated as a broad entertainment and whisks it out of the jaws of the problem-making machine. It's on that level that this broad, sprightly and ultimately mindless evening must be enjoyed.

Hence, enter Len Cariou, the pussycat Petruchio. This is Cariou at his most enjoyable, the macho but softened by supreme self-confidence to the point where he can't be roused to anger. Does Kate dropkick him? Why (ho, ho) he's hoisted himself on a chair and she nearly breaks her toe on its wooden leg. Does she swing a hard object at his cranium? Why (ho, ho) he has deftly ducked, and how much did father Baptista say her dowry was?

Despite the amusing encouragement of Keith Dinicol's bouncing Biondello and Lewis Gordon's agile and prancing servant to Petruchio, Grumio, it took Sharry Flett as Katherine a while to catch on to the comic flavor of the evening. She played the courtship with a grim earnestness that was at odds with the prevailing tone and didn't really fight Petruchio on his own ground. Rather than mocking him, she took him seriously. Rather than amusing disdain, she registered hatred.

The scenes where Petruchio starves and ill-clothes his new wife to break her insolence are tarted up with comic touches that remove their unpleasantness. The dozen servants point the finger of blame in military unison at anybody but themselves, and loveable Grumio dances around the table where Kate is fainting from hunger. Finally she begins to play the game, and here Miss Flett emerges as an actress with comic ability. She agrees to call the sun the moon at Petruchio's command, but she does it with agreeable gamefulness. Her final knee-bending speech was still not quite clear in direction, but at least she had become an asset to the production.

Lewis Gordon's Grumio was great fun, and Barney O'Sullivan as Baptista was dignified yet amusing. Lynne Griffin as the empty-headed but adorable Bianca was both those things, a dizzy send-up of the spoiled pretty girl; but she overdid the flouncing and tongue-sticking-out somewhat.

But by and large the cast contributed amiably to an enjoyable evening at the wife rodeo. This production won't please those who see Shakespeare wrestling with dark questions of the battle of the sexes in this play, but it will delight those who think the issue has been beaten to death and could bear a little laughter. And there may be more of those around than one would think — of both genders.

Sharry Flett and Len Cariou: no dark questions about the battle between the sexes, thanks.

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Toronto Star Thursday, June 18, 1981

Shrew without sex is a dud

Particularly when a minor character steals the show

STRATFORD — Max Helpmann is one of the ornaments of the Stratford Festival company, so naturally it was a great pleasure to see him stride away with The Taming Of The Shrew last night.

When a company member whisks off with a show right under the nose of the likes of Len Cariou, it does seem like an underdog has won one. Not that Helpmann behaves like an underdog. On the contrary, he commands the stage with the authority of an Olivier.

Even though he only has a tiny rule, that of Vincentio, father to Lucentio, who is part of one of the most convoluted love tangles in dramatic literature, Helpmann creates with marvellous economy the most enduring character to be seen on stage all evening; an honest, bewildered and grumpy father who refuses to be made fun of.

But what kind of production of the Shrew is this when a minor character in the subplot steals the show? A sexless production, I'm afraid.

A Shrew without sex is like an ocean without water.

Not equals

The problem is that there can be no sexual electricity unless Petruchio and Kate are equals. Here they are not. Cariou is a bully boy of a Petruchio, starting out on what promises to be a long career as a wife beater. Poor Sharry Flett, once again cast entirely against her style, her charm and her talent, can no more stand up to Mr. Macho than a mouse could roar at a lion. What, pray, is funny about watching that? In fact, watching Flett be cowed by Cariou is about as much fun as watching a slave lick Simon Legree's boots.

There are, however, many distractions that help take attention from Kate and Petruchio, although they are not all by any means as welcome as Max Helpmann.

The director, Peter Dews, has concentrated heavily on the tiresome subplot of Bianca and her tiresome suitors, and their even more tiresome disguises. Even though Shrew is one of the most frequently performed of Shakespeare plays, I defy anyone to properly sort out the Grumios and Grumios, and sure enough, in this production they are all, servant or master, indistinguishable one from the other, as they dash about the stage creating the impression of ceaseless amusement.

Sing-song voices

Never, not even in Young People's Theatre's epic this past season, have the shenanigans seemed quite so endless. Perhaps this is because the cast speaks in a sing-song reminiscent of old-fashioned elocution, the voice rising

Humiliation: Len Cariou is a bully boy of a Petruchio and Sharry Flett is cast against her charm and her talent as Kate in The Taming Of The Shrew, critic Gina Mallet says.

GINA MALLET

at Stratford

inevitably at the end of each line. A couple of them are even encouraged to talk baby-talk, notably Lynne Griffin, who makes Bianca so coy that she could curdle fresh milk.

Shakespeare's sexual innuendoes are rendered in quotation marks, with much heavy emphasis, and graphic signals, gestures toward the codpiece and so on. Really, were the Elizabethans so elephantine in their wit, or is it that Dews is worried that we clean, simple-minded innocents of the TV generation won't understand unless it is pounded into us that way back in the 16th century, men and women also told dirty jokes?

The production is earnestly authentic commedia dall' arte. One thought longingly back to the Neptune Theatre's free-for-all Shrew of last winter, which was directed by Denise Coffey as pure mayhem, the jokes transposed to the Maritimes and the fun fast and furious and distinctly fishy.

After all, there are not many memorable lines in Shrew — if, indeed, it was really written by Shakespeare — and the play can be tampered with surely at will. At Neptune, of course, there was also a superbly paired Kate and Petruchio, Susan Wright and John Neville conducting a feisty flirtation rather than the long, drawn-out act of humiliation this Stratford Shrew seems to be.

Not that the humiliation seems intentional, exactly. But then, what is the purpose, the shape to this production?

This Shrew looks charming, all soft browns and muted colors, the stage paved with pale pink brick and the balcony decorated by Susan Benson with a leafy arrangement.

Still, the same old question needs to be answered. What made Dews want to direct this play? Why, other than the fact that the Shrew always seems to sell tickets, is this play being done at all when it's done so often everywhere else and was done here only a couple of years ago.?

There is no sign that Dews has any special insights to offer, and there are other roles in which it would surely be far more rewarding to see Cariou tackle. And it's not as though there is a crackerjack cast to hand. Frankly, some of the actors seemed not merely unfamiliar with the Festival Theatre stage but with Shakespeare, too.

Barney O'Sullivan seemed to be simply walking through the role of Baptista, and it was distressing to see Lewis Gordon fall back into his Sanford & Son routine as a hyperactive Grumio. But at least he was attempting a character. His colleagues tended to make do with attitudes.

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CANADIAN PRESS CLIPPING SERVICE

The Taming of the Shrew takes new twist at festival

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By James Nelson
The Canadian Press

STRATFORD, Ont. (CP) — All that business about a shrewish woman being tamed to serve, love and obey her lordly husband is but the dream of a drunken tinker.

That, at least, is the way the Stratford Festival is presenting Shakespeare's celebrated comedy, The Taming of the Shrew, this season.

Len Cariou won an opening night ovation as the swashbuckling tamer of Sharry Flett as Katharina, a sweet-voiced but sharp-tongued shrew.

Director Peter Dews not only presented the play complete, with the opening scene involving the tinker Christopher Sly — one that is often cut to shorten the performance — but added another scene at the end to complete the story of the play within a play.

The story is that Sly falls asleep after a long day at a local tavern, and an unnamed lord puts him to bed with instructions that he is to be treated as a lord when he wakes up. Meanwhile, a troupe of strolling players happens by, and they perform the story of The Taming of the Shrew.

After Katharina has submitted to her husband and the play ends in most accepted versions of the 1590s text, Dews added a scene in which Sly is awakened by a barmaid and goes home to tame his own wife, now that he has learned in his dream how it is done.

Purists might cavil at the country's most honored classical theatre tampering with the works of its master playwright. But Dews, former artistic director of the Chichester Festival in England, has brought the play full circle to a logical conclusion.

The production, which is running in repertory with Moliere's The Misanthrope and Shakespeare's Coriolanus, is lavishly cast and costumed, with villagers at the pub who do nothing all evening long but watch the play.

Cariou, the Winnipeg-born Broadway star, was a reserved but robust Coriolanus Tuesday night, and Wednesday night a dashing, debonnaire Petruchio, the man who is willing to marry and tame Katharina for the wealth she has.

Flett is not the tempestuous shrew often portrayed on the stage, but one whose sweet voice and smile just mask her rebellious temper.

She delivers the play's most controversial speech for contemporary women — "I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace, or seek for rule, supremacy and sway when they are bound to serve, love and obey . . ." — with a smile that questions Katharina's sincerity.

Perhaps it is best to leave it in doubt. Women's rights advocates have denounced Shakespeare's philosophy as too old-fashioned to believe.

Lynne Griffin is almost more lively than Flett as Katharina's sister, Bianca, but with a gentle, even temper, and Peter Hutt makes a lover for her with a charm and sexuality that are entirely believable.

Desmond Ellis, making his Stratford debut this season, plays Sly with a Scottish brogue, and spends most of the evening in the stage balcony, alternately observing the play, sleeping off his drunkenness and interjecting his comments on the action.

Rod Beattie plays the old Gremio, a vain suitor for Bianca's hand, with welcome comic touches, and Lewis Gordon is a sprightly if middle-aged fool and servant to Petruchio.

The only stage set is a tree in fall colors spreading over the brick patio of the village pub. Designer Susan Benson provided Elizabethan costumes in autumnal colors so consistently as to give the production a golden hue, lacking in much contrast.

The Taming of the Shrew is the only one of the four productions opened by the festival this week which is scheduled to remain in the repertory throughout the season and into the fall when it will be played for school audiences until Oct. 31.

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—ENTERTAINMENT— The Globe and Mail Tuesday, June 16, 1981

Stratford's Pinafore wallows

BY RAY CONLOGUE

STRATFORD — H.M.S. Pinafore opened the Stratford Festival's 29th season yesterday afternoon — an able enough launching, although it was impossible not to notice the barnacles on the keel of this particular vessel. Leon Major should have been the ideal director for a revival of Gilbert and Sullivan's spoof. He knows opera direction inside and out, and is happiest on the non-musical stage with farce and comic business. What better combination for operetta?

But abilities from different venues can work against each other. The opera director in Major went primarily after voices. Michael Burgess as the Pinafore's captain, Katherine Terrell as his daughter, Josephine, and James McLean as Ralph Rackstraw, the humble seaman who falls in love with her although she is "above his station." All three together do not have enough stage presence to set off a smoke detector.

What they have, and that in abundance, is glorious voices. McLean sings that musical antimacassar, The Nightingale Sighed for the Moon's Bright Ray, with pleasant clarity and vigor, nicely underscored by the director's old tricks of crowd choreography: the mass of sailors tiptoe back and forth in rhythm with the ebb and flow of poor Rackstraw's socially inappropriate passion. But he acts not a note of the song. Burgess as the captain, and also as an opera singer with a track record as a legitimate actor, tries harder to underline his solos, but no matter how big his facial expressions become they do not compensate for a simple and ineluctable lack of presence.

Miss Terrell as Josephine presents a different problem. Where the two men, and most of the other soloists, strive to leave out the bel canto frills and go for lucid phrasing, Miss Terrell plunges in as if she were singing Lucia di Lammermoor. Most of the time she sounds simply inappropriate, as if a high-minded Admiralty had sent a diva instead of a doxy to entertain the men. By happy accident she has The Hours Creep on Apace, the orchestration of which sounds like a spoof of grand opera pretensions; here her shapely tones are a perfect complement to the music.

This discussion of the singing style is appropriate because it underlines Major's decision to go for a "straight" version of Pinafore, rather than a spoof such as Joe Papp's now-famous Pirates of Penzance in New York. But to speak of straight Gilbert and Sullivan is misleading, because they were mild social satirists in their own day. What Papp has done is a spoof of a spoof, in recognition of the fact that the original spoof has grown weak with time. Major has gone the other route: to glorify the musical values (which suffer greatly in Papp's production) at the expense of theatre value.

That may be why so much of the individual comic business, usually fluid and building to an amusing frenzy in other Major productions, simply goes flat. Jim White as the "unable able seaman" is funny enough getting caught in the rigging, but the rest of the sailors don't have the confidence to underline and build on the visual joke.

Not that the production doesn't have its strengths. The one strength constantly before our eyes is Murray Laufer's wonderful set, a confection of a ship of the line, with tiny Corinthian columns in front of the cabin doors and dowelled rigging for the sailors to climb. Astrid Janson's costumes are bright and assertive, and Michael Whitfield's lighting cheery if literal-minded (you notice the wattage shifting down every time Dick Deadeye appears).

The show is not without strong performers. What a relief to see Eric Dunkin as the bluestockinged admiral who lusts after Josephine. He is the Colonel Blimp without whom no G & S can be complete, and his limp-wristed "Oh, ahoy!" to a tardy minion drew an effortless laugh. He has a pleasant voice, but it is in no way equal to the demands of the music. Happily, however, in this one case the director has traded off musical excellence for a genteel, lightly daffy performance, which is essential to counteract the prettiness of the rest of the cast.

Speaking of prettiness, couldn't they have found somebody really ugly for Dick Deadeye? Avo Kittask, minus the humpback, could probably play the captain better than Burgess. His operatic background seems to include a few buffo roles, but the villain in a show like this needs to be excessive and snarly in a way that no operatic clown is likely to be.

Many of these quibbles were highlighted by a general lack of ease, a sense of working too hard for laughs, in the opening performance. As Pinafore eases into its run it will no doubt enjoy itself more, but it remains a clear, true, and somewhat excessively bright banner to summon the true Gilbert and Sullivan believers. It is not likely to attract the unconverted

Katherine Terrell as Josephine: Leon Major went for voices, at the expense of stage presence

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C4/TORONTO STAR, TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 1981

Pinafore sunk by ponderous reverence

GINA MALLET

at Stratford

STRATFORD — Is Wonderland the future of the Stratford Festival?

This ominous notion was suggested yesterday when the beleaguered festival's 29th season opened in a welter of garish and lavish decoration — and reports of the actors being offended by the festival's advertising campaign which has honkytonk overtones.

Well, hie over to the Avon and see what they mean. The theatre's brick facade has been blanketed with vulgar decorations of a vaguely nautical kind, while inside the theatre the huge aft deck of a barque, snarled in a million knots no sailor ever knew, is filled with costumes designed in Dayglo colors.

If, in fact, Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore were not so well-known, and the score not so precisely and affectionately rendered by music director Berthold Carriere and a splendid cast of singers, the show might be mistaken for Shirley Temple's Good Ship Lollipop.

No such luck

Now, don't get the impression that this Pinafore in any way resembles the wild, anarchic eclecticism of the New York Shakespeare Festival's Pirates Of Penzance, which used pop singers as stars. No such luck. There, for all the liberties taken with G & S, and some horrendous howlers as well, Pirates' larky spirit came through loud and strong. G & S take almost anything, topical updating, fooling around, terrible singing, even orchestral sludge, and still retain their Victorian charm and dignity, not to mention their iconoclastic zest, as countless amateur productions prove. They could undoubtedly survive the Avon, too. What they can't take, however, is reverence.

Stratford's Pinafore is about as eclectic as a church service. You might think that the D'Oyly Carte copyrights — which immured G & S so long in an anachronistic housestyle — were alive and well this side of the Atlantic. That is a shocking thing to have to say when you consider that it was Tyrone Guthrie's production of Pinafore for the Stratford Festival that turned London's West End on its ear in the early '60s. Those times have certainly passed.

Leon Major directs Pinafore with a ponderous literalism that is embodied by Murray Laufer's model ship of a set, which allows little space for any attractive movement, and which immediately deep-sixes Gilbert's cheeky irony at the expense of England's defence establishment.

You'd never know from this production that Gilbert drew blood with his brand of satire, that his claws were very sharp when he set about savaging contemporary politicians and social mores. You'd never know that although it does seem terribly funny that poor little Buttercup mixed up a couple of babies in their cradle, the result is cruel: the captain is demoted to a tar, while Ralph Rakestraw inherits the Captain's stripes.

Major's Pinafore is simply a childish fantasy, without social context and without much character. A bland democracy shrouds this love story, which is done and undone by caste and class. There is no sharp sense of the deprivation incurred by such distinctions, yet it is from the knowledge and awareness of such deprivation that the highest comedy comes.

The crew spend their time grinning at the audience. Yet there have been wonderful productions where the crew were a truly [illegible] lot. Guthrie, for example, had Dick Dead Eye doing petit-point, a marvellous and accurate piece of social observation. But Major eschews work on character, depending instead on mechanical tricks, like swinging Buttercup aboard on a bosun's chair.

Perhaps he has conceived Pinafore more as an opera than as a musical comedy. This would explain why there is not a single piece of admirable acting to be seen on stage. While the cast do indeed sing well, that is quite simply not enough. You can hear fine Pinafore performances on records. What is needed is the bravura gusto of large-scale musical comedy performances that make the characters step out and shine in their roles.

Joke's in Gilbert's lines

Patricia Kern is only kindly as Buttercup; James McLean is merely nice as dashing Ralph Rakestraw; Michael Burgess has no authority as the Captain; while Katherine Terrell's Josephine is a pert rather than a melting heroine.

Avo Kittask's Dick Dead Eye is about as menacing as a pussy cat.

Eric Donkin should have saved the sinking Pinafore with Sir Joseph Porter, the magnate turned ruler of the Queen's Navee, but instead he chose to send Miss Rosalind Hood along to fill the part. Now, it may be tempting to camp up Sir Joseph, but it isn't half as funny as simply playing him straight. The joke is not in his idiosyncrasy but in Gilbert's lines.

I have to add that my appreciation of the show was marred by the fact that I could not see without assuming a sort of running crouch position the front of the stage. Something has happened t the Avon Theatre which makes the front row balcony no longer a desirable location.

H.M.S. Pinafore:
Book by W. S. Gilbert. Music by Arthur Sullivan. Musical direction by Berthold Carriere. Directed by Leon Major. Choreography by Judith Marcuse. Set by Murray Laufer. Costumes by [illegible]. Lighting by Michael J. Whitfield. Avon Theatre. [illegible]

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Critic calls H.M.S. Pinafore a fun-filled production

By James Nelson
Canadian Press

A joyously sunny and fun-filled production of Gilbert and Sullivan's spoof of British officialdom and naval tradition, H.M.S. Pinafore, opened the Stratford Festival Monday at the 1,000-seat Avon Theatre.

Eric Donkin, the seasoned comic character actor who recently toured his one man-one woman show, the Wonderfull World of Sarah Binks, made Sir Joseph Porter, KCB, into a wonderful fop, whose official pronouncement that love levels all ranks proves a turning point in the ridiculous plot.

Michael Burgess was a stalwart and sedate Capt. Corcoran, commander of the Pinafore, and Patricia Kern was the full-voiced Portsmouth bumboat woman, Little Buttercup.

The principal love story parts were sung by Katherine Terrell as Josephine and James McLean as Ralph Rackstraw, the lowly seaman who aspires to marry his captain's daughter.

Love may not in fact level all ranks, but it all works out when Buttercup confesses she confused two youngsters — Corcoran and Rackstraw — many years before when she practiced baby farming.

Director Leon Major stripped away hoary old staging traditions, grown primarily out of the D'Oyle Carte productions of Pinafore, and replaced them with new bits of foolery. Designer Astrid Janson provided new blue, white and pink costumes bringing a fresh air to the old Victorian operetta.

Janson's work even extended into the orchestra pit, where the players were costumed as British tars, and conductor Bertrhold Carrier decked out in officer's braid.

It is the first time the Stratford Festival has mounted a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta since the early 1960s.

While the Savoy operas have fallen out of fashion — mainly because of their Britishness, perhaps — this one is a bright revival.

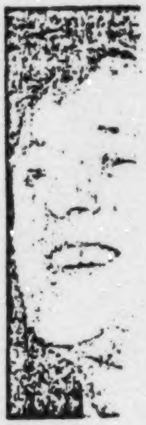
The chorus of sailors is robust, the chorus of Sir Joseph Porter's sisters, cousins and aunts "whom he numbers by the dozens" light and frivolous. Judith Marcuse choreographed the show with what can pass wittily for sailor's hornpipes.

The Beacon Herald
Wednesday, June 17, 1981

NEW YORK POST, SATURDAY, JULY 11, 1981

On the Town

Stratford Fest alive and well



Stratford's 29th Festival in Ontario is off to a flying, thanks in large part to Brian Bedford, left, and Len Cariou, right. Bedford's staging of "Coriolanus" was nothing short of sensational. Cariou is one of Canada's top actors and reasserted his classic talent in "Taming of the Shrew" and "Coriolanus."

CLIVE BARNES

Broadway's foremost drama critic drops in at a top theater event

AFTER all the alarms and excursions, the incredible thing is that Stratford's 29th Festival in Ontario actually opened.

The Festival's Board of Directors, having messed around interminably and almost unforgivably, in providing a replacement for the outgoing artistic director, Robin Phillips, was entirely to blame. After such tergiversations that would even make a Canadian Government blush, they eventually emerged with John Hirsch as artistic director and Muriel Sherrin as producer. The two have done a miraculous job getting the company together and putting a season on.

In the second stanzas almost any season would have literally been a miracle. The fact that the first three productions on the main festival's stage were all more than creditable, and one, Brian Bedford's staging of Coriolanus, got Hirsch's first season off to a flying start.

The company that Hirsch and Miss Sherrin have got together is strictly in the Stratford tradition, and it marks not only the return of Bedford, but also the long-delayed reappearance of one of Canada's major actors, Len Cariou.

Cariou appeared in the leading roles of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Coriolanus*.

He has rarely been seen as a classic actor — although I first saw him in minor roles with the same Stratford company in 1964, in Chichester, England. In intervening years, Cariou had become a major actor, but his opportunities for classic roles have been somewhat limited.

This time his return to Stratford has proved a triumphant reassertion of his classic talent. In his roles as Petruchio and Coriolanus he shows a range of Shakespearean style that was simply handsome in its depth. Cariou is an actor who continually tries to spread his wings. His rambunctious Petruchio was a perfect complement for his heroically proud and arrogant Coriolanus, both showing the diversity, comic and heroic of Shakespeare's wild ranging protagonists.

In a sense, it seems to be a man's world at Stratford this season. In the other first production, Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, it was Bedford and a wonderfully restrained Nicholas Pennell who took the principal honors.

The general mettle of the acting has, however, been unexpectedly high in the special circumstances of the Company's engagement and rehearsal time. Scott Hylands, in *The Misanthrope* and in *Coriolanus*, provides a double performance of engaging variety.

Hirsch himself has elected not to direct any of this season's performances and simply to supervise the general festival perspective. His wisdom has been justified in his choice of directors.

Jean Gascon, a former artistic director at Stratford, has provided an elegantly traditional version of the Moliere, and Peter [illegible] offers a *Shrew* that makes no concessions for Shakespeare's admittedly anti-feminist views.

It is a positive and heterogeneous view of the play in which Sharry Flett plays a Katarina with splendid aplomb. She is less successful in the more subtly graduated role of Celimene in the Moliere.

The Shrew and *The Misanthrope* are most decently staged and for the most part finely acted, and both strike a superior visual impression.

There is no doubt that this company still, frankly against most serious probability, is maintaining its rank of one of the three great English-speaking classic theaters, together with Britain's National Theater and its Royal Shakespeare Company, and it effortlessly demonstrated this in Bedford's sensational rendering of Coriolanus.

Bedford, closely associated with the Stratford Festival, has only previously directed *Titus Andronicus*. Here, he gives Shakespeare's tragic image of arrogant heroism with a flair that sets the seal together with Cariou's performance, on the first productions of this new festival management.

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APPENDIX III: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A. MacFarlane
School of Journalism
University of Western Ontario
Communication Studies, University of Windsor

Study of Metropolitan Daily Newspaper Theatre Criticism

Questionnaire:

1. Do you believe that a daily newspaper theatre critic provides a service to readers? If so, could you describe the service.

2. Do you believe that theatre criticism enjoys a high readership in your paper? Why?

3. How does your approach to theatre criticism fit within your paper's editorial philosophy?

4. Does your critical/intellectual style conform to one or another orothodox category of criticism: sociological, formalistic, psychological, etc.? Or do you find that elements of several critical approaches are present in your work?

5. Is there a convention concerning the role of the newspaper critic that is tacitly observed by both critic and reader? For instance, is the critic supposed to be giving useful guidance to the theatrical people, and the newspaper's readers observing the process over his/her shoulder? Is the critic supposed to be the audience's advocate in seeking entertainments of a certain standard? What do you see as the conventional, or mythical, relationship among critic, audience, theatre and reader? How does it relate to the reality of daily newspaper criticism?

6. How do you approach a production? What are you looking for? How did you arrive at these criteria?

7. When you write a critical piece what do you intend it to do? Is the piece supposed to function at more than one level? What purpose(s) does it serve?

8. Do you write for a particular audience, or simultaneously for different groups in the community served by your newspaper? How do you conceive of your audience(s)?

9. How would you describe your philosophy of journalism? Do you subscribe to a particular ethics of criticism within the philosophy?

10. As a major critic, how do you see your responsibilities (a) to your paper (b) to its readers (c) to a production's management and investors (d) to the professional playwrights, actors and other creative personnel connected with a production?

. . . 2

11. Does your power at the box office concern you? Does it influence what you say or how you say it?

12. Do your responsibilities as a critic include encouraging the growth and viability of professional theatre (a) in Canada, (b) in
Is so, how do you carry out this responsibility?

13. Critics obviously need theatre. Sometimes the reverse is not felt to be as true. Would you give me your view of the mutual needs of theatre for critic and vice versa?

14. Are all critics failed future or resting playwrights or performers? Or does criticism in popular newspapers have creative validity of its own?

15. Can criticism of a production be "right" or "wrong"?

16. "All work is not of equal value." This appears to be a central assumption of criticism (although possibly not quite such a truism as it appears). In any case, what is it that qualifies you to decide which of the productions you see is more valuable than another? What do you discern that I might not? Why is your opinion valid?

17. Do you apply different standards to different kinds of production: regional, amateur, Stratford, Broadway, classical, vernacular and so forth? If so, how is this justified?

18. It always seems to me that critics are tentative in their assertions about the role of the craft, but often quite didactic in their observations during their exercise of it. This seems inconsistent to me. Does newspaper criticism tend to imply that it is something which it actually is not: authoritative, certain of clear-cut standards, possessed of unquestioned access to the truth? If so, why?

19. Assuming that your judgment is valid, is a judgment that disagrees with it invalid?

20. In other words, is there an authentically sound view of a production? If so, how is it determined? (By unanimity, for instance?)

21. If there is no one "correct" critical judgment, then is (daily newspaper) criticism simply impressionistic?

22. Can a critical statement be said to be true? If so, is one that disagrees with it false?

23. Can newspaper criticism itself be subjected to criticism? What are the criteria you would use if doing so?

. . . 3

24. If you were reviewing your own columns in collected form, what would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of them?

25. What would be the general thrust of your critical opinion of the critical work published in the

26. Do you write for your newspaper differently than you would if your writing were directed to a person you knew to share your own intellectual and cultural level and tastes? Why? How?

27. Should a critic be concerned about the results of her/his writing?

28. Can a critic enjoy friendly relationships with people whose work he/she may be called upon to judge? Do you? How do you deal with this problem?

29. What is the principal satisfaction in your line of work? Is there something you would rather do for a living?

30. Speaking generally, what are the objectives of daily newspaper theatre criticism? Do you feel that they are being met by Canadian newspapers?

31. What popular newspaper critic past or present do you most admire? Why?

32. What person or body of work has had the strongest influence on your work?

33. Have you any general comments on the social validity of criticism in popular daily newspapers?